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ABSTRACT

This study investigated community organizing for school reform in eight urban sites. The organizing involved intentional building of power among parents, youth, and community residents in low-income communities of color. Researchers surveyed 66 organizing groups and interviewed a subgroup of organizations. Overall, most groups defined their membership as individual, and most were multi-issue in focus. Most adult organizing groups were in New York and Chicago, and most youth organizing groups were in San Francisco and Los Angeles. About 18 groups organized both adults and youth. Many groups defined broad schooling goals (e.g., transforming school culture), and some included broad improvements in educational quality. Initiation of organizing varied considerably by group. Local support organizations and national networks provided critical support. Groups used data in many ways to leverage accountability. Teachers had varying reactions to group organizing. Most groups were part of longstanding citywide or regional coalitions. Four strategic issues confronted groups organizing for school improvement: access, legitimacy, accountability, and developing effective strategies. Groups developed new leaders with skills, knowledge, and vision to raise fundamental questions about school performance and access and draw others into school reform campaigns. Key impediments included limited resources, lack of local support organizations, and insufficient assessment of the impact of their work. (SM)

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Mapping the Field of Organizing for School Improvement:

A report on education organizing in Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, the Mississippi Delta, New York City, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Washington D.C.

Submitted by the
Institute for Education and Social Policy
New York University

with

California Tomorrow
Designs for Change
and
Southern Echo

August 2001

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Barbara Gross directed the research phases of this study, supervising the identification of groups and the survey and interview development and implementation efforts. She was ably assisted by Sherry Giles. This report is based on data gathered and analyzed, under Barbara's direction, by:

- *Baltimore:* Richard Gray Jr. and Laura Wheeldreyer.
- *Chicago:* Suzanne Davenport of Designs for Change;
- *California (Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area):* Mamie Chow, Laurie Olsen, Ruben Lizardo and Carol Dowell of California Tomorrow;
- *Mississippi Delta:* Nsombi Lambright of Southern Echo;
- *New York City:* Barbara Gross, Norm Fruchter, shola olatoye, Sherry Giles, Mili Bonilla, Kavitha Mediratta and Juan Echazarreta;
- *Philadelphia:* Barbara Gross, Mili Bonilla and Kavitha Mediratta; and
- *Washington DC:* Anne Henderson.

We wish to thank the staff of the almost 70 organizing groups who participated in this study. We also appreciate the thoughtful comments of our national advisory group members who assisted us in developing a definition of community organizing to guide this research, and also helped us identify organizing groups in each site. (Advisory group members are listed in the appendix of this report.)

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INTRODUCTION

The use of community organizing strategies to reform urban public schools, particularly in poor neighborhoods and communities of color, has grown exponentially during the past decade. In New York City, for example, only three groups were organizing for school improvement in 1994, when the New York University Institute for Education and Social Policy first began to map the field of community organizing and develop support for organizing efforts. Yet, currently more than a dozen groups, most neighborhood-based but some with regional and national affiliations as well, are engaged in this critical work.

Based on data collected from July – December 2000, this research study identified 66 community groups organizing to improve schools in 8 sites across the country: Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, the Mississippi Delta, New York City, Philadelphia, the San Francisco Bay Area and Washington, DC. Our data, combined with the results of a complementary study by Research for Action and the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, suggest that almost 200 community groups are currently engaged in education organizing. New groups are constantly emerging and older groups with a history of organizing in other areas are turning to education issues. National organizing affiliates are moving into new sites and expanding their organizing agenda to include education. Coalitions of organizing groups are forming to impact schooling policy at local and state levels.

In some instances, community organizations are addressing the poor performance of neighborhood schools in response to pressure from residents, parents and young people. Others are taking this step because of the linkage between healthy communities and successful schools. While this organizing is largely focused on public school parents and low-income families, a number of groups are organizing high school youth through innovative techniques that integrate youth culture and popular education into their work. A growing number of groups are using an intergenerational approach.

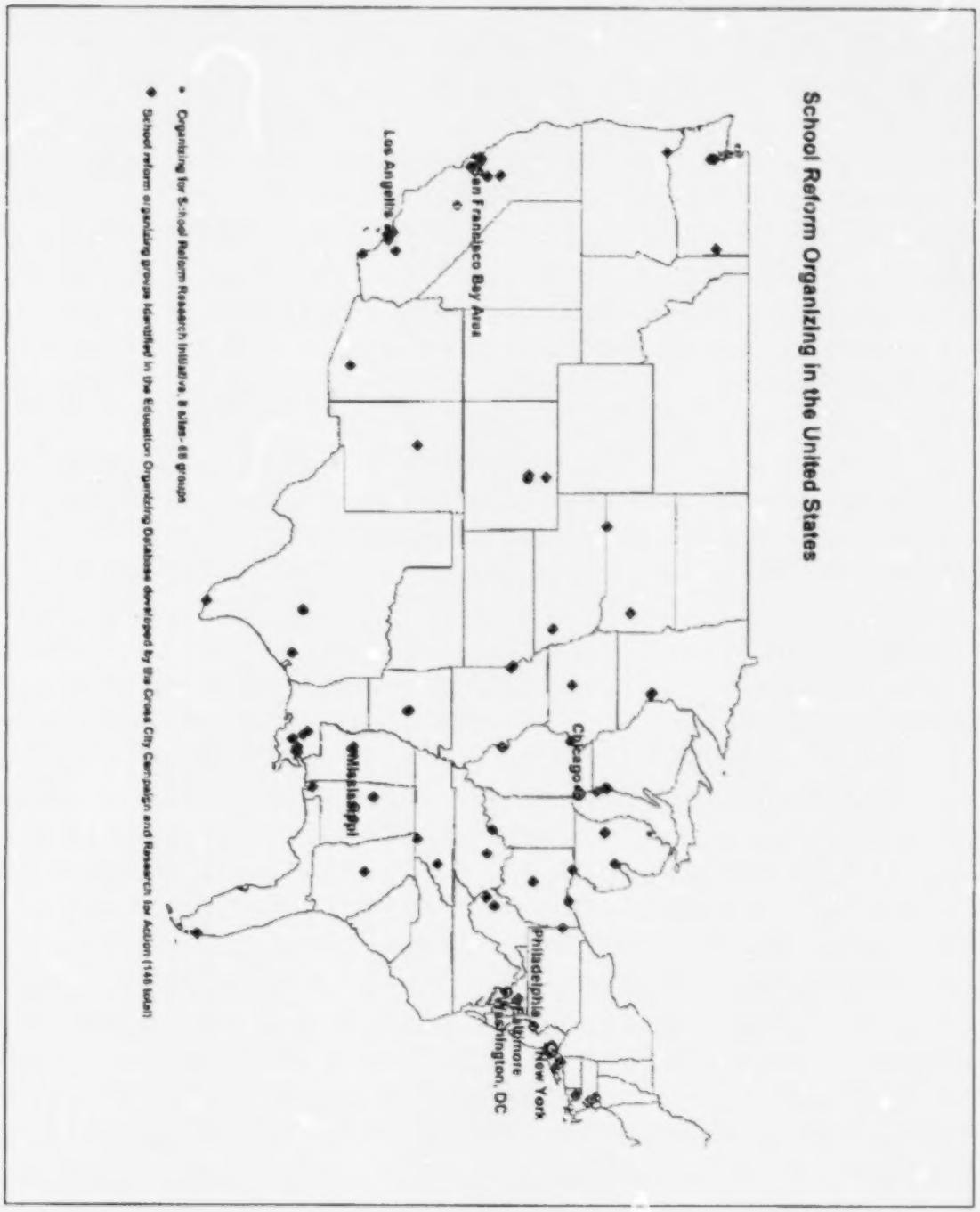
The organizing documented in this study is, fundamentally, about the intentional building of power among parents, young people and community residents in low-income communities of color. This organizing is challenging traditional methods, forms and conceptions of parent and youth involvement -- particularly in low performing schools with high staff and leadership turnover, bureaucratic and dysfunctional cultures, and a lack of adequate support and guidance from district staffs. In these schools, parents and youth are not asking for advisory participation and involvement, they are demanding the power to prod --and help-- their schools towards higher levels of performance. Such demands are increasingly based on research and data. As the standards movement takes hold in states across the country, community groups are adapting those standards as baselines in their organizing, and learning how to use them to leverage change.

Their work over the past decade is achieving striking success. New youth and adult leaders are emerging with the skills and knowledge necessary to raise accountability demands and engage others

in school improvement campaigns. These efforts are not only helping to improve the physical and social environments of schools; they are improving school leadership and staffing, and creating higher quality learning experiences for students. Groups are bringing new resources and programs to improve curriculum and instruction, challenging unfair and biased discipline policies, confronting tracking, and winning commitments from private and public funding sources for new after-school programs and other kinds of family and schooling supports. And they are doing this on shoestring budgets with minimal staffs.

The explosive growth of organizing to improve public education, particularly in low-performing schools and districts, makes it imperative to look intensively at this burgeoning field. Understanding the methods, strategies and achievements of organizing groups can help build broader support for education organizing, and give new groups a road map and an arsenal of field-tested tactics for improving their schools.

Figure 1: School Reform Organizing in the United States


School Reform Organizing in the United States
Organizing for School Reform Research Initiative, 8 sites- 68 groups
School reform organizing groups identified in the Education Organizing Database developed by the Cross City Campaign and Research for Action (148 total)
Los Angeles
San Francisco Bay Area
Chicago
Philadelphia
New York
Baltimore
Washington, DC

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH PROCESS

This research study maps the field of community organizing for school reform in eight sites around the country. The NYU Institute for Education and Social Policy conducted this study in collaboration with three research partners: California Tomorrow, Designs for Change, and Southern Echo. Each organization has a long history of involvement in education research and advocacy, as well as in a variety of community organizing efforts for school reform.

We began our research by establishing a national advisory group of organizing practitioners, academics, and foundation representatives (Appendix 1). We then engaged in a process of developing a definition of organizing to guide the research partners as they mapped their cities.

The process proceeded through online discussion between the advisory group and the research partners. Through that dialogue, we identified five criteria for groups doing school reform organizing that have guided our selection of organizations to include in this study. For the purposes of this study, groups are engaged in community organizing for school reform if they have the following characteristics:

1) A base of parents, youth, and/or neighborhood residents who engage in collective action to address issues related to poor performance and inequities in local public schools and whose vision includes excellent and equitable public schools for all children.

2) A focus on winning concrete changes in school policy and practice using a variety of strategies including, but not limited to, mobilization, direct action, negotiation, training, and working in coalition.

3) A structure that supports and encourages democratic decision-making by group members in all aspects of the organization including decisions about issues, strategies, tactics, and vision.

4) A process for engaging in ongoing recruitment of new members and the development of leadership from within the membership base.

5) A commitment to building a strong and lasting organization dedicated to altering the power relations that lead to failing schools in low and moderate income neighborhoods and communities of color.

Once we determined the criteria for selection, the four research partners used a snowballing methodology to map the community-based groups organizing for school reform in the eight study

sites. Through this process, and with the assistance of the national advisory group, during the summer of 2000 the research partners identified and surveyed 66 organizing groups, including independent community organizations, local affiliates of national networks, youth organizations, advocacy groups, community development corporations and social service organizations with a school organizing component.

We and our research partners selected a subgroup of organizations to interview during the fall of 2000. These on-site interviews provided further exploration of each group's goals, strategies and tactics, successes and challenges, and directions for the future. Designs for Change in Chicago also conducted three focus groups to discuss local strategic issues and concerns emerging from their survey and interview data.

With our research partners, we developed a framework to guide the data analysis and presentation of findings in the eight sites. Each research partner drafted and shared preliminary reports with the other partners for review and critique. These discussions proceeded by phone, email and in a face-to-face meeting, and shaped the analysis presented in this national report.

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

Community organizing as a strategy for improving schools has many roots:

- The labor movement's community mobilizations throughout the 1930's;
- The organization of ethnic neighborhoods into powerful consolidated political bases in the 1940's and 50's;
- The mobilization of black youth and African-American communities during the civil rights movements of the 1960's and subsequent struggles by other ethnic and identity groups;
- The efforts to build neighborhood-based citizens' organizations generated by War on Poverty programs and the formation of poor people's organizations like the Welfare Rights Organization that grew into ACORN in the 1970's;
- The struggles for community control of public institutions that generated varieties of local mobilization during the 1970's and 80's;
- The organization of community development corporations and similar neighborhood housing and community improvement groups during the 1980's; and
- The workplace and community-based mobilization of immigrants, youth and people of color against racial and other forms of discrimination in the late 1980's and 90's.

These roots have maintained the viability of community organizing methods and strategies. Over the past decade, groups organizing to improve housing and public safety began to focus on the concentration of the low performing schools in their neighborhoods, and to highlight the absence of accountability in these schools. Multi-issue development and service organizations also entered the schooling arena because of the linkage between neighborhood revitalization and the quality of local public schools.

There are explanations for the emergence of school reform organizing within the arena of public education as well. Local, state and national level education initiatives are creating new accountability systems that demand higher student performance without providing the adequate resources and supports students need. School districts, often under state directives, are implementing high-stakes exams and reporting systems designed to pressure low performing schools to improve all the cities in this study have recently introduced or expanded their standardized testing regimens, along with new promotion and graduation standards, as well as new systems of reporting out individual student and school performance. Education reform groups, parents, youth and other community groups in these sites are demanding the resources necessary for schools to meet these new standards.

Urban school districts are also under pressure to cede control over their schools to for-profit management companies, and to provide students with vouchers for private schools. Baltimore, New York City, Philadelphia and San Francisco are considering or have recently entered into contracts with management companies to run low performing schools. In New York City, the Board of

Education's decision to turn five failing schools over to the Edison Corporation galvanized an organizing drive led by ACORN, with Community Advocates for Educational Excellence and other education reform groups. This drive succeeded in getting a 4-1 vote by parents to reject Edison's take over of the schools.

The growth of charter schools across the country is also creating opportunities for community-based organizations. Almost every state has introduced legislation to allow the creation of schools outside of traditional district bureaucracies. Community groups are involved in designing and initiating new small charter schools and, in a few instances, in developing the facilities for these programs.

Several states and districts are engaged in protracted and divisive battles over educational equity and access. California voters have passed a series of ballot initiatives to bar undocumented immigrants from public schools, to end affirmative action in education, to deny bilingual education to non-English speaking students, and to criminalize a wide range of youth indiscretions. Proposition 21, which imposed a series of changes to make it easier to punish youth offenders, galvanized the Schools Not Jails coalition, uniting youth organizations against what many social control analysts have called the prison industrial complex. For these groups, education organizing is a proactive strategy for societal change.

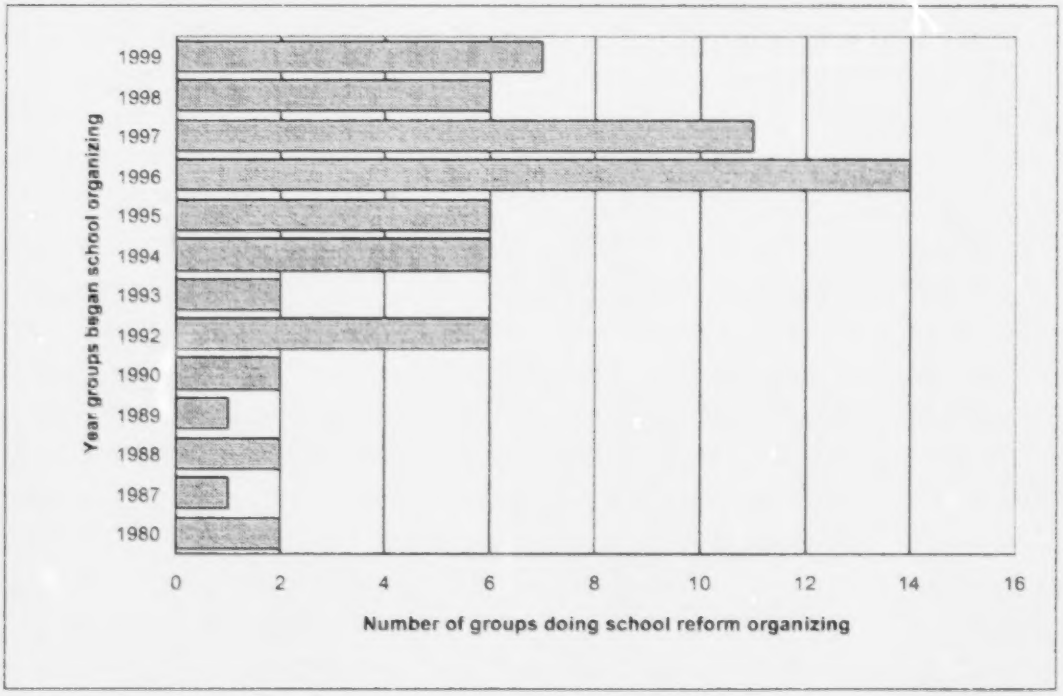
Although other states have yet to experience such a virulent backlash against immigrants, they are experiencing similar trends in the perception and treatment of urban youth of color, which are reshaping the relationship between urban school districts and urban police. The New York City Board of Education, for example, facing a persistent campaign by the city's Mayor to install police in all the city's public schools, placed the school safety system, and all school safety officers, under the supervision of the police department in 1998. This action provoked groups protesting police brutality, racial profiling, and an unjust juvenile justice system to focus on the public schools. Youth Force, an organizing group in New York City, has organized student walkouts and is monitoring police presence in local high schools.

Another explanation for the expansion of community organizing for school reform lies in the changing relationship between community-based organizations and schools. Foundation and government funds for after-school programs are bringing more community-based organizations into the schooling arena. Community service, housing and economic development groups, as well as immigrant rights and advocacy groups, are providing after-school programs to serve their clients' or members' children. Through these programs, often in school buildings during after-school hours, organizations confront the inadequacies of their local schools. Such programs not only help to surface a variety of schooling problems, but also create a forum for discussions among parents about inadequate schooling. NYC community service and development organizations like the New Settlement Apartments and the Jacob Riis Neighborhood House, which initiated Queensbridge

Community in Action, were pushed by their clients and staff of their after-school programs to become involved in improving their neighborhood schools.

Finally, local organizing groups are being encouraged to focus on public schools by both national and regional organizing networks. ACORN, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the Gamaliel Foundation, National People's Action (NPA) and its training arm, the National Training and Information Center (NTIC), and the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing (PICO) have evolved programs to help their member organizations define school reform organizing strategies, intervene in local school districts, and take action at the federal level. NPA and NTIC, for example, brought groups together in Washington DC to discuss their local organizing on school facilities. NTIC analyzed competing legislative proposals introduced in the House and Senate, organized actions and public meetings with key officials, and is helping other groups in its network launch and sustain school facilities campaigns. At the regional level, organizations like the Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment in Los Angeles are supporting and guiding the development of new organizing initiatives.

Figure 2: Groups entering the field of school reform, 1980-1999.



WHAT KINDS OF GROUPS DO THIS WORK?

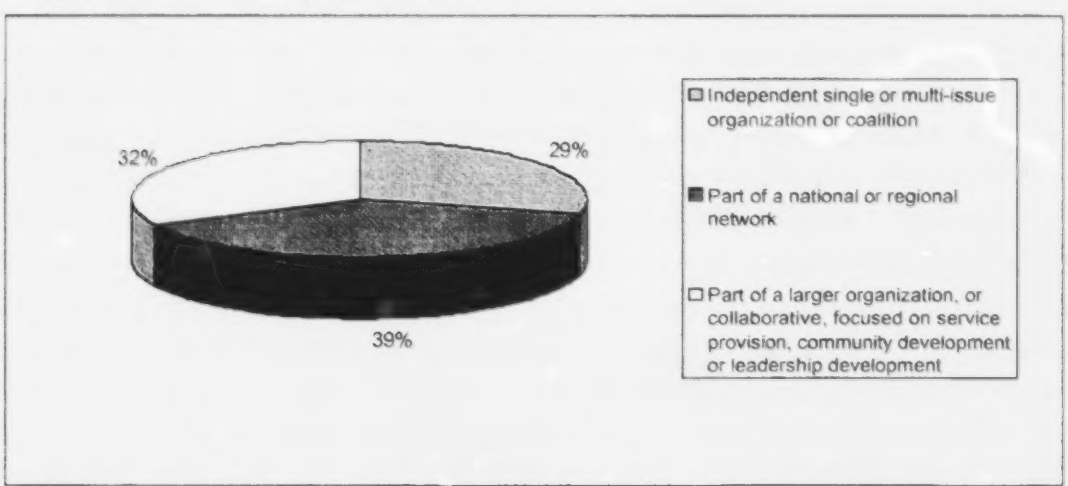
Our scan of groups organizing for school reform identified 66 organizations doing this work. Sixty-seven percent of the groups we surveyed define their membership as individual; the other 33% define their membership as organizational – churches, block groups and neighborhood associations. Almost 20% of the organizations are faith-based. While 20% say that, in addition to organizing, they provide services or advocate for service improvement, 80% of the organizations we surveyed concentrate on community organizing. Eighty-two percent of organizations are multi-issue in focus.

Slightly under a third of these school reform groups are single issue or multi-issue organizations or coalitions self-supported and independent of any larger group. The rest are sponsored or supported by larger organizations. Larger organizations include:

- ***National and regional networks that have established and support direct action membership organizations as the primary vehicle to build leadership and take action.*** Examples include: ACORN, the Gamaliel Foundation, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), National People's Action (NPA) and the National Training and Assistance Center (NTIC), and the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing (PICO), as well as local organizations like the Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (LA) and Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth in the Bay area.

- ***Collaboratives or organizations that focus on service provision, community development or leadership development as their primary activity.*** Collaboratives include Southwest Youth Collaborative in Chicago, which brings together youth development organizations and initiated Generation Y. The Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation in NYC and Bethel New Life in Chicago are examples of multi-issue development groups sponsoring education organizing.

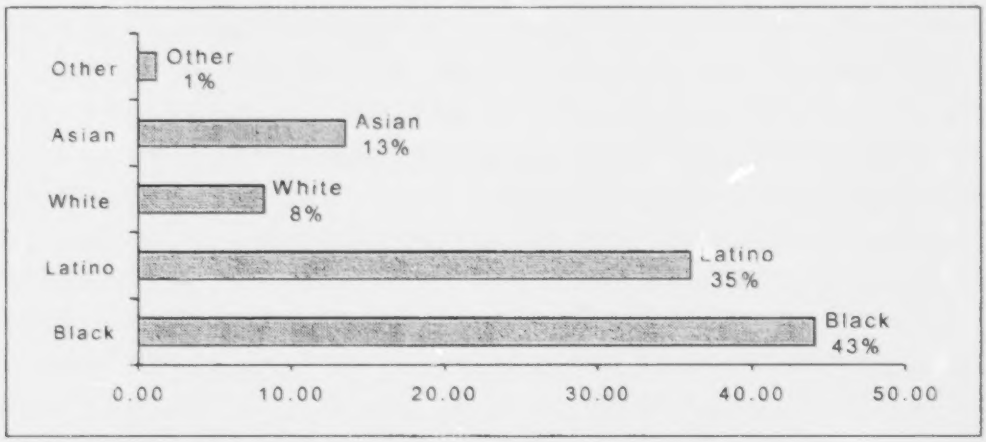
Figure 3: What kinds of groups do this work?


32%
29%
39%
Independent single or multi-issue organization or coalition
Part of a national or regional network
Part of a larger organization, or collaborative, focused on service provision, community development or leadership development

Note: Groups affiliated with the Erase initiative of the Applied Research Center are not identified as part of a national or regional network because the nature of their affiliation is less formal.

Race and ethnicity of group memberships. The majority of groups have multi-racial memberships of black (African American and Caribbean American) and Latino populations, with smaller numbers of Asian, Anglo and sometimes Native American members. Groups in Baltimore and Mississippi are predominantly African American, while groups in other cities have memberships that are more diverse. Several target particular gender and ethnic groups: Cambodian high school girls (Asians and Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health, in the LA region), Vietnamese refugees (Asian American LEAD in Washington DC), working-class Caribbean people (Community Action Project in New York City), Chinese and Southeast Asian immigrants (Asian Americans United in Philadelphia). Many of the adult organizing groups specify parents or community residents as their target constituencies, and stress the predominance of mothers in their organizing efforts. All the Mississippi groups define low-income African-American families, including youth, as their primary constituents. A fifth of groups' memberships include middle-income families, in addition to low income and working class families.

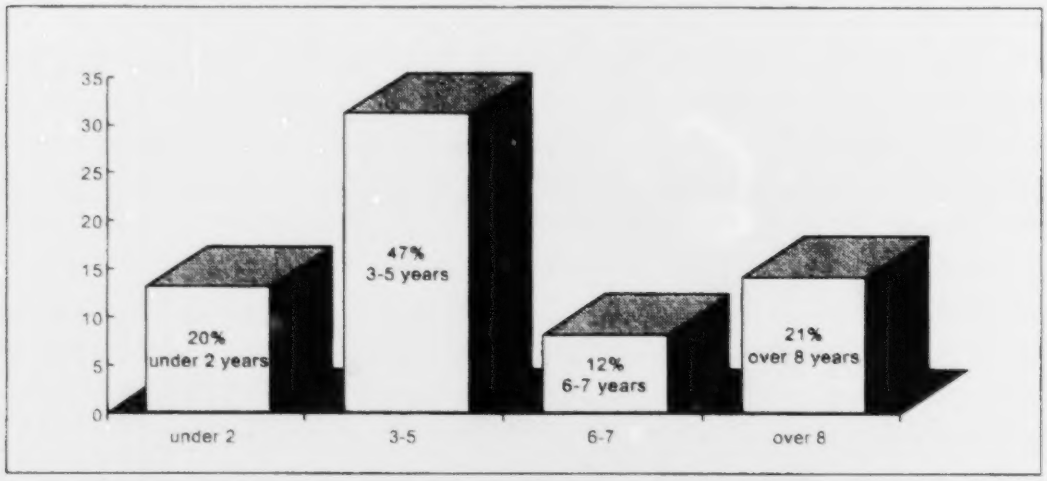
Figure 4: Race and ethnicity of group memberships*



Note: These percentages reflect an average number over all groups.

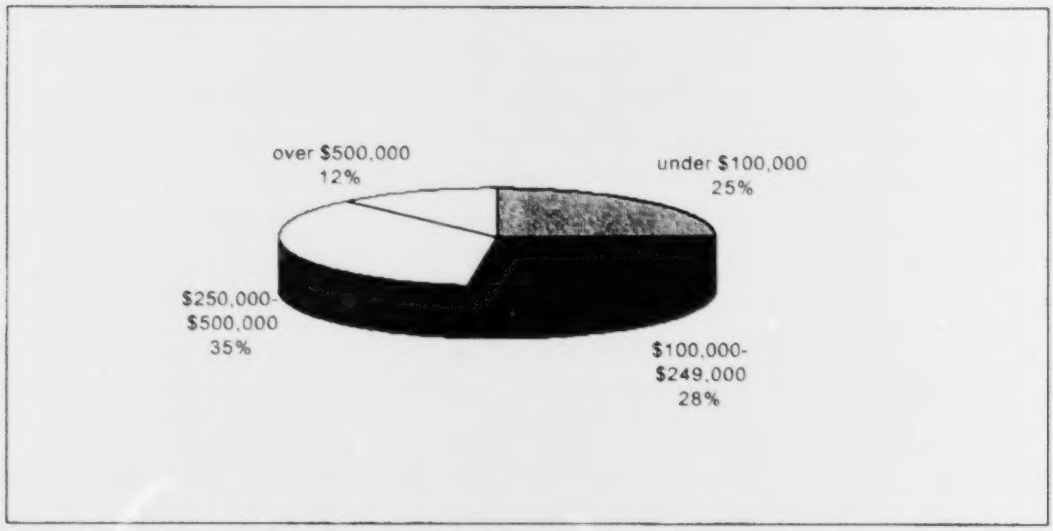
Length of time organizing. Most of the organizations we surveyed are not newcomers; 80% have been doing education organizing for at least four years. Chicago has the largest number of experienced organizations, followed by New York City groups. Nonetheless, given the seven to ten year timeframe school reform experts estimate is necessary to affect school change, the field is relatively new. Groups are just beginning to amass the knowledge of public education and expertise in school reform organizing necessary to this work.

Figure 5: Most groups have at least four years of education organizing experience.



Organizational capacity. Organizational budgets range from under $100,000 to over $500,000, although not all these funds directly support the education organizing. Most groups work with minimal staffs, and some rely entirely on the energy and dedication of volunteers. Multi-issue organizations are able to increase staffing of large events by drawing upon other organizers in their organizations.

Figure 6: Annual budgets of organizing groups



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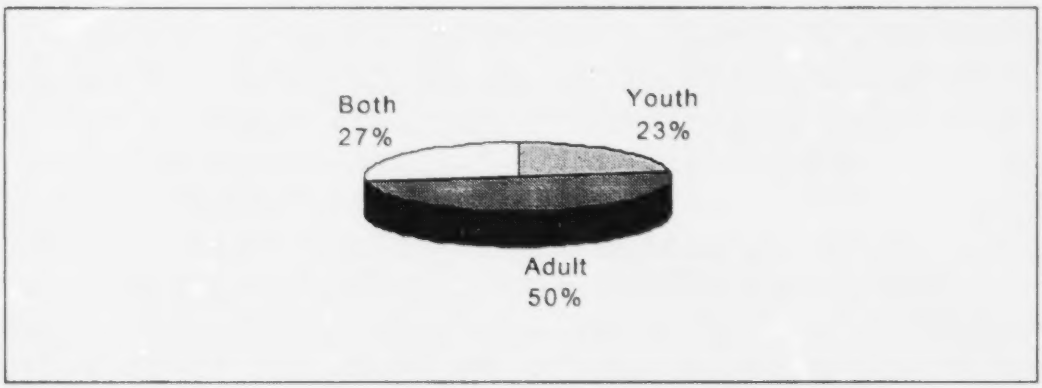
Youth, adult and intergenerational organizing. From our data, we distinguished three types of groups: those that work primarily with adults; those that work primarily with youth; and those that work with both adults and youth, some intentionally developing an intergenerational approach. Roughly three fourths of the groups work with either adults or youth, but not both. Almost half organize parents or community residents, while the other half focus on youth and intergenerational organizing, as shown in Figure 7. Youth organizing is most prevalent in California, and intergenerational organizing is the dominant organizing approach in Mississippi.

Almost all the youth groups recruit only high school youth; only a few include parents as well. Many adult groups focus on elementary schools, do not organize young people, have no separate structures for youth participation, and provide no decision-making roles for youth. If young people are involved, they are likely to be the children of activist members. Adult, youth and intergenerational organizing groups are described more fully below.

Figure 7: Half the groups organize adults, while half do youth and intergenerational organizing.



Adult Organizing Groups

The largest concentrations of adult organizing groups are in New York City and Chicago; roughly 70% of the organizing groups in both cities work primarily with adults. Most of this adult organizing was initiated by membership-based, multi-issue organizations, rooted in neighborhoods, in response to concerns raised by residents or parents about local elementary schools. These organizations use traditional organizing methods. . "We go door knocking within the boundaries of the schools," explains Melissa Spatz of Blocks Together in Chicago. "We pass out flyers through the schools, and attend meetings of the local school council, bilingual groups, GED classes. We pass out flyers outside of the school... we make phone calls, attend church events."

Some organizing efforts were initiated by long-standing multi-issue, neighborhood development organizations, or collaboratives of such organizations, not previously involved in organizing. The East Bay Asian Youth Center in the San Francisco area is the lead organization of the San Antonio Community Collaborative, a comprehensive community-building effort that includes three community-based development organizations and four schools. New Settlement Apartments and Jacob Riis Settlement House have recently begun parent organizing in New York City. Because these groups had little prior experience with organizing, they began by reaching out to parents through their after-school programs. A few of these groups' work combine organizing with development strategies. The Logan Square Neighborhood Association in Chicago, for example, developed projects in its ten neighborhood schools to improve reading achievement by training parent reading mentors and tutors; it also established a bilingual teacher training program at one of the ten neighborhood schools.

Approximately 20% of the groups we surveyed organize local faith-based institutions, and are affiliated with the IAF, Gamaliel, or PICO national networks. A few neighborhood organizations, like the Rogers Park Community Action Network in Chicago, have memberships that include both individuals and faith-based organizations. While faith-based groups vary in the specific strategies they use, most make contact with public school parents through their member congregations, and use these contacts to begin school-based outreach to other parents. The Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project (EPOP), for example, enters schools in which the group has relationships with parents, either as members of EPOP member institutions or churches, or because of relationships those parents may have with EPOP leaders in other schools. Organizers and leaders do one-on-one meetings with parents and teachers to identify concerns around which to build school organizing campaigns.

> Through one on ones, [our organizers and leaders] ask people to tell us about their lives, how they spend their time, their values and faith. From that we discern what their concerns are and what's most significant. In our monthly meetings we [ask organizers and leaders] "what have you heard?" And we do training. We then do research on issues people are interested in, we hold an action meeting and get as many people as possible with power to change things to come to that meeting.
>
> Leaders hold meetings and do research; they meet with principals and talk to other parents. Last year we got commitments to set up 40 after-school homework centers.
>
> Bob Untiedt, San Francisco Organizing Project, PICO

A few groups focus only on schools, and target a single neighborhood school or a cluster of schools. The Alliance Organizing Project (AOP) in Philadelphia builds committees of parents whose children attend the local school. Kelley Collings of AOP says:

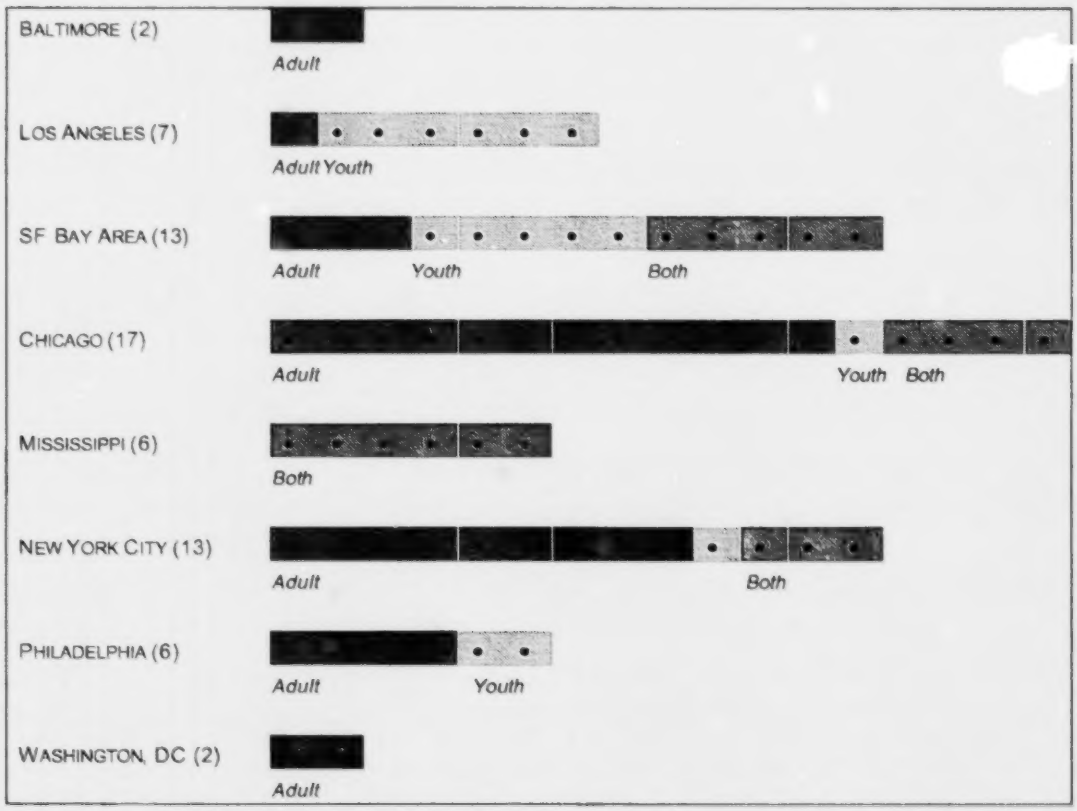
> We start by talking to the existing leadership in schools. They point you to people who point you to people. We also stand outside of schools, and do petitioning at

churches and recreation centers. We don't do door knocking. We get names and contact information from parents, and then we meet with them in their homes.

AOP committees do local organizing on school problems, and participate in a citywide AOP committee that takes action on district-wide issues.

In Chicago, adult organizing groups also organize local school councils. Parent and community members of local school councils campaign every two years for over 4,500 positions as elected school council members. They mobilize voters for the elections and turn out parents after the elections to support the work of the councils. Adam Krugell of the Northwest Federation notes, "we have a majority on local school councils at eight or nine schools, and 20-30 parents come to council meetings consistently."

Figure 8: Youth, adult and intergenerational organizing groups by research site



Youth Organizing Groups

Most youth organizing for school reform is taking place in the Bay area and the Los Angeles region (74% of organizations in these regions focus on youth organizing.). Two groups are active in Philadelphia, one each in Chicago and New York, and none that we could identify in Baltimore and Washington. Though these groups are predominantly led and driven by young people, several have been started by, and are partially or fully supported by, larger adult organizations. Examples of sponsoring organizations include:

- Independent multi-issue neighborhood organizations such as the Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project and PUEBLO in Oakland;
- Regional networks of organizing groups such as the Asian Pacific Environmental Network in the Bay Area;
- Community development, leadership development or service-based groups such as Communities for a Better Environment in Southeast LA, or collaboratives of such groups such as the Southwest Youth Collaborative in Chicago.

One sponsoring organization, the San Francisco Peer Resources, which created Change-makers, is a joint effort between a local education fund and the school district.

Most youth groups were initiated to target specific schooling problems or, as POWER in LA defined it, to improve schools as youth workplaces. But they often frame these problems in terms of the broader social and political development of young people. The presenting issues include safety, truancy, sexual harassment, even an anti-privatization campaign. Several groups emphasize the school transformations they are seeking: Youth Together in the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, focuses on fighting violence and racism in schooling. The organization provides leadership development, promotes multi-cultural justice, peace and unity, and helps students develop and lead school change campaigns.

WHO WE ARE

The mission of the Community Coalition is to contribute to transforming the economic and social conditions in South LA that foster addiction, crime, violence and poverty by building a community institution capable of involving thousands in creating, influencing and changing public policy.

South Central Youth Empowered Thru Action (LA)

Several youth groups target particular ethnic constituencies (African-Americans in Mississippi, Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders in the Bay Area, Los Angeles and Philadelphia). Asian Youth Advocates in the Bay Area is focused on building "the leadership capacity of Laotian young women in the Richmond-San Pablo community to take action to make real positive changes in their community, towards environmental and social justice issues." A number of groups are working with diverse constituencies to build multi-racial organizations. Youth of Oakland United (YOU), for example, offers this description of its work:

> We're a community-based membership organization that fights for social, economic and racial justice in Oakland. Our members, leaders and staff are people of different races, culture, age, gender, sexual orientation and income levels. By developing the political analysis of leaders and organizing skills of our members and allies, we help to build power in our communities and win institutional changes that impact on our lives. (George Villanueva)

Because many high schools draw their students from across their districts, most youth groups reach out to young people during the school day, rather than after school when students have dispersed across the surrounding neighborhoods. Many youth groups bring in new members through leadership training offered during the school day; they also hold sessions after school and on weekends. A few groups, like South Central Youth Empowered Through Action (SCYEA) in LA, have developed middle school training programs to create a "pipeline of younger students to carry on leadership activities and high school organizing committees on the campuses." Initiated six years ago by the Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment in LA, SCYEA has run four large-scale campaigns and leadership development cycles.

Youth groups that are part of larger multi-issue neighborhood organizations tend to use neighborhood-based recruitment strategies. George Villanueva of YOU describes his organization's approach, "Our organizers do a lot of ...street outreach to make a first contact. If youth are coming out of summer school or while they are waiting for the bus or walking home, we talk to them, give them a flyer [and] try to get them to come to a meeting or cultural event."

Most school reform happens by adults, but especially at the high school level, can you engage in meaningful change without including the major constituency group? Sometimes they're included in a tokenized way, but not in a leadership way. So you're not really getting at anything that's meaningful because the young people themselves aren't the ones saying this is what we want, this is what we need and this is why.

Including youth means more than just calling a focus group of students together and saying what's up. It takes a lot of development because there are so many layers of internalization and oppression that you have to work through to heal and develop people's political consciousness and strategic thinking. A lot of youth development strategies need to be employed.

It's challenging work. It's easier to go to your student government people and have them as token representatives of your student body.

Margaretta Lin, Youth Together
San Francisco Bay Area

Given their focus on high school youth, these organizations necessarily have transient membership bases. Youth affiliates of larger adult organizations attempt to link their leaders and activists to their adult sponsoring groups. As a component of a larger, community-based, multi-issue organization, YOU sustains the involvement of young people through campaigns on other issues. George Villanueva of YOU says, "Youth don't always stay youth. So it's good that PUEBLO has other campaigns that they can get involved in." Few youth groups are actively working at this transition, however. Most youth groups, instead, are

concentrating on transforming high school recruits into effective activists with the "power to work on school reform around social justice issues."

Many youth groups work independently of adult organizing efforts, and some expressed frustration at their isolation from the field of education organizing groups. Kim McGillicuddy, former director of Youth Force in NYC, notes:

> The biggest challenge for youth organizers is the lack of support from the adult and advocacy communities. We don't have the youth movements of the old days. Now there is a youth services model in cities and it is silencing youth movements. Because youth organizing tends to be around the most displaced youth, it's easy to dismiss them. It's incredibly important that youth organizing [is viewed as] a part of community organizing, and that it's seen as connected to the work adult groups do.

Intergenerational Organizing Groups

Our research identified 18 groups that organize both adults and young people; a third of these organizations work in the Mississippi Delta, while the remaining are concentrated in New York City, Chicago and the San Francisco Bay Area. Many are adult organizations that define youth activity as a critical component of their work, and have developed structures to recruit and involve youth in running their own campaigns as well as in working collaboratively with adults. At Blocks Together in Chicago, Melissa Spatz observes,

> We have a youth council made up of 11-18 year olds. They choose their own issues. Right now, the council is focused mostly on safety and better anti-drug advertising in the community. When their interests are the same as the adults they will work together, like in the campaign on school construction. Young people work on every aspect of the organizing, from door knocking to speaking to the press, traveling and talking with officials. They are a part of everything that we do on the issue. All decisions are made by community leaders, and young people are a part of that. Also, one of our youth members is on our board of directors.

Some groups bring youth and adults together through their affiliation with other organizations. Youth United for Change in Philadelphia, for example, links young people to the Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project, which organizes parents and church members on school improvement and other neighborhood issues. In the Bay area, Youth Making Change is linked to Parent Advocates for Youth through their sponsor organization, Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth.

Some groups explicitly define the goal of "trying to build an intergenerational approach to education organizing." "Young people have a lot to contribute and they are the ones that are going to make things happen. But they benefit a lot from the support and guidance of older people," says Grace Kong of Asian Youth Advocates in the Bay area. Asian Youth Advocates and all six of the

Mississippi groups, along with other groups, use intergenerational models through which young people are recruited, trained for leadership and encouraged to fulfill a variety of organizational roles, including decision-making and leadership. This intergenerational approach tries to integrate young people as equals into all aspects of the adult work, while creating a separate space for them to articulate concerns and develop leadership skills. At Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County (Mississippi), Melvin Young says,

> The only difference in the work is the special attention that we give to developing the tools and skills that the young folks need in order to take charge of the work once the older organizers sit down. While they work on the same level as adults, they are also provided additional training and development opportunities that will enable them to become successful organizers.

Mississippi groups' use of intergenerational strategies stems from organizers' experience in the Student Non violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and their assessment of why the civil rights movement in Mississippi died after the Voting Rights Act was passed. These organizations believe that involving youth is critical to sustaining their work, because youth have the least fear of and resistance to change, and are more likely to become involved in social movements.

Several groups began with an explicitly intergenerational focus; Asian Americans United in Philadelphia uses after-school and summer youth leadership programs as "a place to begin dialogue with parents as to what's going on in our schools. High school students staff the project, which provides younger children with support, Asian role models and a way to build relations across generations." But others began by organizing adults or youth and then broadened their focus. Mary Dailey of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition recalls:

> We initially stayed away from organizing youth because it we didn't think it made sense to invest so much time in leadership development for members who would grow up and move out of our organization. Young people came to our events but really just to cheer on their parents. Two years ago, we hired an organizer who understood how to work with young people. She began organizing neighborhood youth, often the ones hanging out on street corners. They got into the issue of overcrowding right away, and joined our campaign to get the Armory renovated for schools. They've energized the campaign and made everything more fun. Our adult members are proud of the teenagers; they see them, collectively, as their children, and they see youth organizing as a source of new leadership and an investment in the future of their communities.

Integrating youth and adult organizing requires a shift in how the organization views young people, from being perceived only as supporters to being seen as potential leaders, so that the youth work is not just an appendage of the larger organization. Mary Dailey continues: "We're learning that it's important to integrate youth into the work with adults. They shouldn't be kept separate." Groups working with young people also face challenges in making the transition to an intergenerational

approach. Jeremy Lahoud of Generation Y in Chicago explains: "Getting parent involvement has been a struggle. We are youth oriented and we have a culture that's different from most parent organizations. We have to figure out how to create a culture that is comfortable for everyone."

GOALS AND MISSIONS

Many groups define broad schooling goals such as winning more equitable schooling outcomes, providing more culturally sensitive schools, or transforming school cultures. Some groups also include broad improvements in the quality of education, such as more effective instruction in traditional schools or the creation of new small schools, as part of their goals. Many groups concentrate on the processes that might make schools more inclusive, responsive, participatory and effective, defining goals such as expansion of democratic decision-making in schooling, leadership development to equip parents or young people to participate in schooling discussions, and empowering youth and parents to fight for change.

SCHOOL REFORM ORGANIZING GOALS

- **Broad equity agendas**, such as winning more equitable schooling outcomes; providing more culturally sensitive schools, or transforming school cultures.
- **Broad improvements in education**, such as more teachers that are qualified, higher quality instruction and improved student performance; or the formation of more new small schools.
- **Processes to make schools more inclusive, responsive or participatory**, such as expanding democratic decision-making in schooling; leadership development to transform school cultures; and empowering youth and parents to fight for change.

Some mission definitions focus on creating the means to bring about schooling improvement or transformation, and specify, as goals, the building of sufficient power to enable disenfranchised constituencies and marginalized communities to improve their lives and their neighborhoods. Other groups define their mission more internally -- providing the development and training of the community leadership necessary to bring about such transformation. Most groups include some commitment to democratizing society through their specific school reform work, but they are organizing to achieve this transformation in different ways, as shown in Figure 9 on pages 29-30.

Many of the East Coast and Chicago neighborhood-based multi-issue organizations define broad **social and political capital-development missions** and work to build the local leadership, power and community capacity that neighborhood improvement requires. Most are members of ACORN, IAF and NTIC/NPA national networks. Madeline Talbott of Chicago ACORN describes ACORN as "organizing for power," to change the existing distributions of power that perpetuate poverty and inequality in ACORN neighborhoods. These groups view neighborhood-based or citywide organizations that mobilize the power of low-income and working-class constituents as the primary vehicles for change. Direct action, issue-based campaigns are often used to "build power and build the organization." Some groups, particularly faith-based organizations in the IAF network, develop

relationships between their constituents and key decision-makers to increase their influence and advance their reform agenda.

Many groups define specific **community-building missions** – creating ways for residents to be involved in shaping neighborhood institutions. The South East Community Organization in Baltimore, which initiated the Southeast Education Task Force, describes itself as promoting "community democracy" to "represent its member groups, non-profits and individuals and to provide them with a vehicle for expressing and meeting their needs through programs and organizing." West Town Leadership United in Chicago seeks to transform a "diverse community into a family community." A member of the PICO network, Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) connects neighborhood improvement with school improvement to make the neighborhood a better place for raising families. A major component of OCO's approach is its one-on-one recruitment strategy, based on the belief that power lies within relationships, and the role of a community organization is to reweave the broken ties of relationships in communities. This work to deliberately rebuild democracy is designed to ultimately result in the building of better neighborhoods and schools (Chow et. al., 2001.) As Liz Sullivan of OCO put it, "We're about radical democracy."

All six groups in the Mississippi Delta **fight racial inequity**. For these groups, schools are the flashpoint of a larger struggle against pervasive institutionalized racism. "Each child should receive a quality education independent of race or economic background," says Drustella White of Mississippi's Concerned Citizens of Montgomery County (CCMC). CCMC "holds school officials, teachers and public officials accountable to educating African American children in the same way that white students are educated. We want our students to have the same opportunities to succeed as white students in terms of access to technology, proper test preparation and adequate text books and materials."

For the past eight years, Montgomery County schools were run under the leadership of a racist superintendent whose goal was to keep county schools in as substandard condition as possible. After identifying the superintendent as the key problem to the inadequacies in the school system, the community started investigating his position in order to develop strategies to get rid of him. During their investigation, they discovered that the superintendent continued to be re-elected because of votes cast by residents of the neighboring town of Winona, even though the superintendent had no responsibilities to that town. CCMC successfully challenged the fraudulent election of the county school superintendent, and in November 2000, helped elect a new superintendent widely viewed as more responsive to community concerns.

Concerned Citizens of Montgomery County, Mississippi.

Leadership development is another core goal. Mildred Wiley of COR in Chicago explains,

> We try to get parents on issues that they are passionate about and then hook them into other things. Parents are not yet outraged that their students can be retained if they

> miss twenty days of school, but they are outraged about a kid being shot. So, we train them on how to read research about youth shootings and how to get data. We [show the connection between the issue and their schools.] They soon understand that the drug house on the way to school could affect kids performance in the school.

Almost all adult organizing groups offer some form of leadership training focused on education reform as well as on the specific skills necessary for effective organizing. "We used to believe that events trained leaders," says Mary Dailey of the NW Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition. "But now we do much more structured training for our leaders. We want leaders to use organizing terminology and develop their capacity for strategic planning." Many groups also rely on formal training programs offered by local or national school reform organizations, like the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform or Community Organizing for Family Issues (COFI) in Chicago, and attempt to link this training with action. Organizations affiliated with national networks rely on them for their training needs, and groups in several sites use local support organizations for training and information about how to improve school performance, school reform, and organizing strategies.

The youth groups we studied are also highly conscious of leadership development issues and emphasize membership training more than their adult counterparts. Almost all have evolved intensive leadership development programs, and some carry out organizing campaigns as components of these programs. Through the University of California (LA) Labor and Occupational Safety and Health Program (LOSH), the People Organizing for Workplace and Environmental Rights (POWER) engages youth in "a semester-long course that includes two practical experiences: peer education (doing presentations on what they learned in class to other students) and developing community organizing plans or projects." Asian Youth Advocates is "trying not just to educate people but to change the relations of power and confront institutions and places that hold power to make decisions about how these conditions affect people." Because these groups see public schools as the terrain for movement building, they attempt to make explicit linkages between school organizing issues and larger social dynamics. "Even when the work is focused on water fountains it's important to understand that it's part of a larger struggle," explains Eric Braxton of the Philadelphia Student Union.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Schools in South Los Angeles do not prepare students to enter college or obtain livable wage employment. Current school reform efforts focus on standardized testing over preparing more students for college and preferred careers. SCYEA believes that a movement led by students, parents, and community members is necessary to win community-driven school reform.

South Central Youth Empowered Through Action (LA)

Most youth groups begin with leadership training to help young people develop a critical societal analysis of, as Youth Organizing Communities (LA) defines it,

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> the silent historic roots of the current education crises which includes racism, sexism, homophobia, class discrimination, reinforced through standardized testing, tracking and inadequate funding, the de-industrialization of communities, teacher deskilling and globalized accumulation of wealth by a privileged few. (Luis Sanchez)

In addition to providing extensive leadership development training, South Central Youth Empowered Through Action (LA) develops organizing actions that will foster youth leaders' political consciousness and commitment to fundamental social change, as well as their understanding of the root causes of poor quality and conditions of their schools.

Leadership Development and Youth Organizing

- The **Kids First! Coalition** in the Bay area is a multiracial coalition of non-profit youth service and development organizations focused on the need to assist youth and adults to organize for school reform. Over the last three summers, KF!C has coordinated summer programs to teach young people how to research and act on critical issues of concern to them and their peers. An initial focus has been Oakland School District's suspension policies and practices. Using traditional and participatory research methods, KF!C youth leaders gathered and analyzed data on suspensions. In 1999 the youth published and released their own report: "Locked out: Exposing the Suspension Epidemic in the Oakland Public Schools." Youth involved in the program negotiated with the superintendent, school board and the teachers union to adopt a revised discipline policy.

- Sponsored by Communities for a Better Environment in Southeast LA, **Youth for Environmental Justice** is a youth leadership development program that prepares young people from several high schools to develop and carry out their own issue campaigns. Since its inception, YEJ has trained 60 youth leaders who have developed and organized a wide range of educational workshops and conferences to educate their peers about the dangers of toxic sites in their neighborhoods. This educational work has served to build a youth-led membership organization that organized several campaigns on toxic issues on local public school campuses, such as siting new schools on or next to toxic waste sites.

Source: Chow, et. al. (2001): School Reform Organizing in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles California.

Immigrant groups work to create **access to educational systems** for their constituents; a few build powerful neighborhood or citywide organizations. Asian Americans United works to empower people of Asian ancestry in greater Philadelphia "to build our communities and unite to challenge oppression." Most immigrant groups work to increase their members' participation in local democratic processes, and to improve the responsiveness and cultural sensitivity of a neighborhood school or a school cluster. Many of these groups define immigrant group empowerment as their goal, and stress the necessity to improve, or transform, the quality of life experienced by their constituents. Sandy Dang, of DC Asian American LEAD, describes her group's mission as "to develop young people, strengthen families and build community."

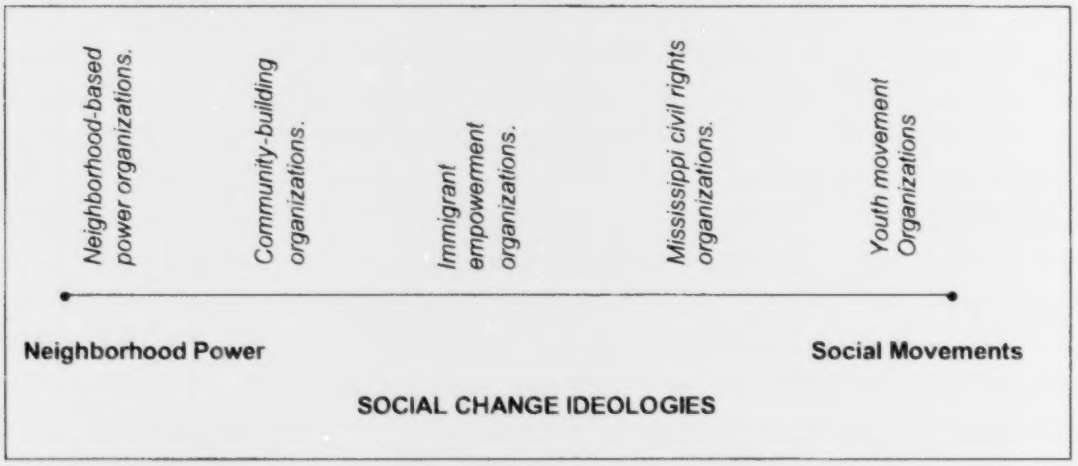
> We are refugees and minorities. The only way to gain economic power is through education. Through education, we can improve health, civic responsibility, social justice. It's important that citizens become more active in the political process, and it's rewarding to see this happen.

Asians and Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health (APIRH), in the LA region, is "devoted to developing the leadership and organizing skills of Cambodian girls in Long Beach, California." Betty Hung of APIRH explains,

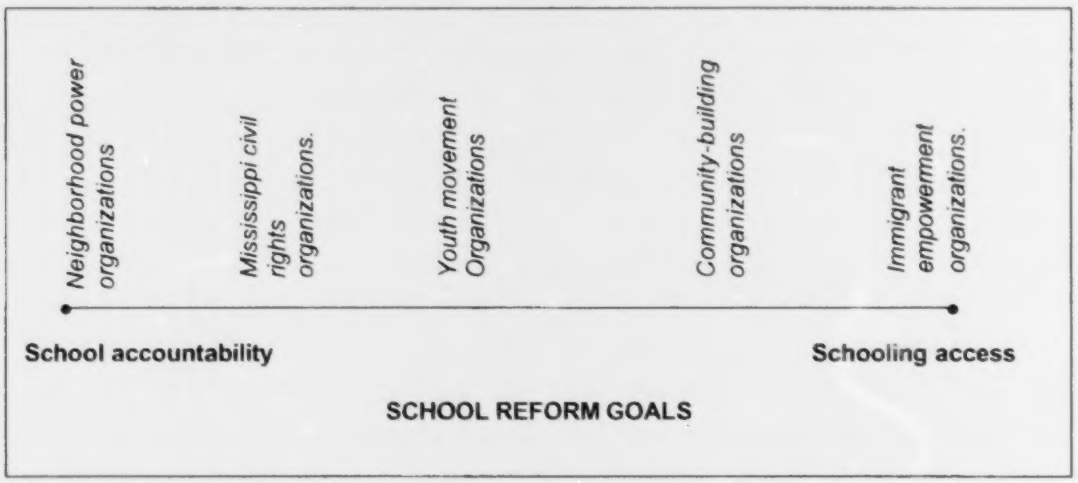
> We're a social justice organization that empowers Asian Pacific Islander women and girls through a reproductive freedom agenda – we also deal with environmental justice, economic justice, human rights and other issues that arise in the community. Our mission is not just to change policies but also to change norms, values and assumptions, to expand opportunities and roles and to challenge dominant frameworks.

Figures 9A-C: How are groups organizing to change schools and society?

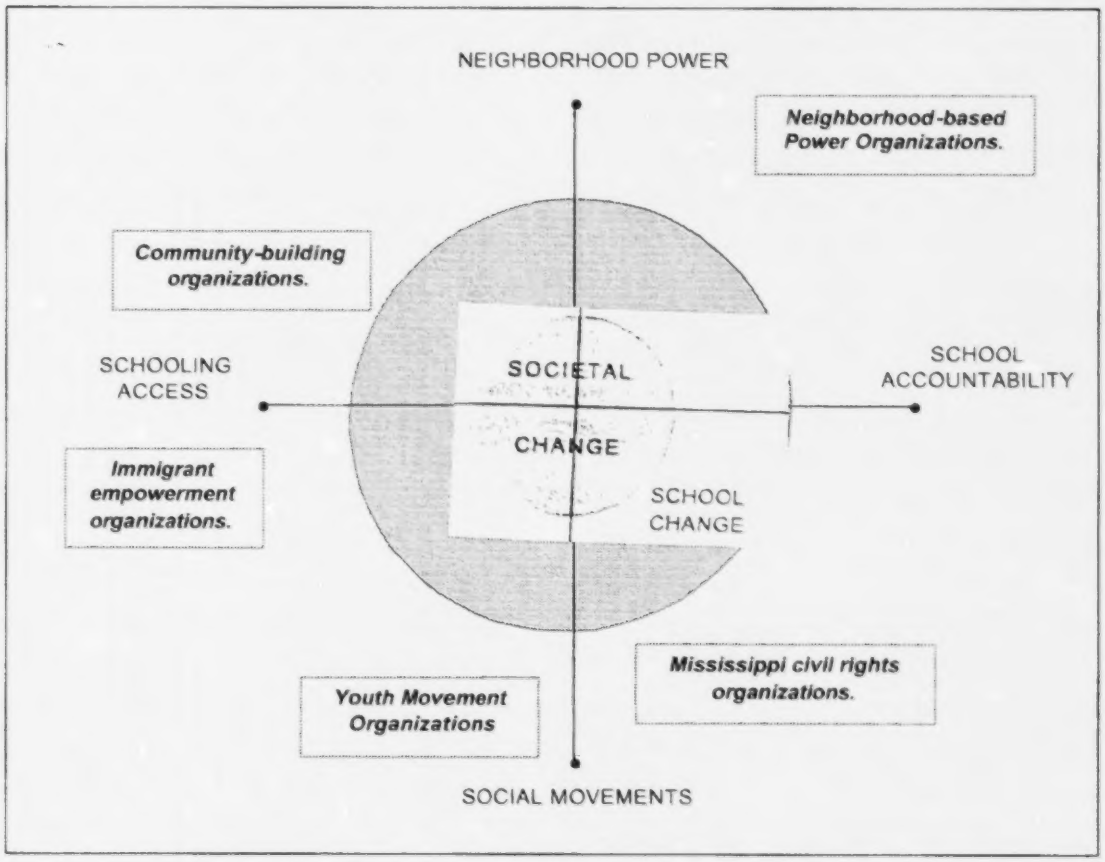
A. The first diagram shows groups along the axis of social change ideologies. Neighborhood-based power organizations are at one pole, and youth organizations building leadership cadres for youth movements for social justice are at the other pole.



B. The second diagram shows how groups fall along the axis of schooling goals. On this axis, neighborhood power organizations are at one pole, demanding greater accountability for schools. At the other pole are immigrant organizations working to increase their constituents' access to schools.



C. When we put these two diagrams together, intersecting the two axes, we can then see how groups fall into the four quadrants created, and how the different types of groups are attempting to reach the goals depicted in the center of the chart. Neighborhood power organizations like the Northwest Federation (Chicago), ACORN and Washington Interfaith (IAF- DC), for example, build power to transform societal power relationships and hold schools accountable. In contrast, youth organizations like Youth Making Change in the Bay area are developing leadership to open up democratic processes and institutions, including the public schools.



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HOW ORGANIZING IS INITIATED AND HOW IT EVOLVES

The initiation of organizing varies considerably by group. Sometimes the focus evolves out of broad-based neighborhood organizing, as with Oakland Community Organizations or the Rogers Park Community Action Network in Chicago. Mary Dailey of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition in NYC explains, "Focusing on education helps us contribute to longer term improvements in our neighborhoods and get to the systemic issues, the root causes of poverty."

Schooling issues evolved from the housing organizing of the West Town Leadership United in Chicago, from environmental issues in the work of groups such as Youth Workers/POWER in Los Angeles and the Indianola Parent Student Group (IPSG) in Mississippi. Betty Petty of IPSG recalls,

> We started as an after-school initiative called the Indianola Math Games League, which assisted students with math, science and reading through games and fun activities. Through this group, parents and students began to talk about the injustices happening in the schools and about the illnesses occurring because of the pesticide spraying. So, we decided to expand our organization to address these concerns.

Several education campaigns started from safety issues such as the focus on sexual harassment that spurred the work of APIRH in Los Angeles. Other campaigns grew out of very specific local projects. A group of parents in Montgomery County, Mississippi began collaborating with the principal and teachers at a local elementary school to implement a cultural enrichment program. From this project, parents began sharing their concerns about the school system, which ultimately led to the formation of the Concerned Citizens of Montgomery County.

Contexts Shape the Organizing

The specific forms of organizing groups deploy depend on their local, state and regional contexts. In Mississippi, all six groups situate their specific education issues in the broader context of achieving full civil rights for African-American communities marginalized by the power dynamics of institutionalized southern racism. Using the lens of racial justice, they are fighting to expand the educational and economic opportunities available to their young people. Building on lessons learned from the civil rights movement, these groups are fully intergenerational and define youth participation as key to their organizations' success and longevity. Mississippi groups all combine local organizing with state level advocacy and legal strategies to change public education policy.

In California, youth organizing has emerged as a force in response to statewide ballot initiatives targeting youth, immigrants and people-of-color, focuses on issues of educational equity, access and racial justice, and tries to link schooling problems with larger statewide issues. The lens of racial justice is more prevalent among youth groups and Mississippi groups than among their East coast adult counterparts. Mississippi and almost all of the youth groups raise issues concerning unfair

discipline policies, opposition to high-stakes testing and the lack of college preparatory curricula by focusing on the racially discriminatory outcomes of these practices. East Coast adult groups including Baltimore, New York City, Philadelphia, Washington DC, and Chicago organizations have focused on inadequate or unsafe facilities, funding inequity, poor instructional leadership and low levels of student achievement. Most of these groups have not defined their campaign issues in explicitly racial terms.

Many California youth groups have multi-racial, even multi-lingual memberships. Luis Sanchez of LA's Youth Organizing Committees says:

> We have to ask, "What culture do we promote in our organizing? When people organize multi-racially, sometimes part of that is mainstream. It's the melting pot version of organizing young people, for example, but what culture are people organizing around? Is it only English, immigrant, non-immigrant? In San Diego there's the issue of border and language that groups in other places don't really deal with. We try to make space for all experiences and cultures. We don't do it perfectly – I don't think any group does – but we always challenge ourselves, especially on language. We really try to make it bilingual and make that positive. That helps expand and build our base because of the home language and school culture they're involved in.

Youth groups integrate culture, services and legal advocacy into their organizing to support their members' participation and to address their individual needs and concerns. Jasmin de la Rosa of Third Eye Movement in the Bay Area reports,

> We use culture to raise awareness among young people, to get the word out about what our issue is or what we're trying to accomplish, to get them involved in the organization, and to popularize just being politically conscious. We have cultural events where we say, 'this is gonna be a party,' and everyone learns organizing skills; the lyrics, the music, the beat deliver a conscious message talking about our issues. We also have times where young people can rap or sing or whatever and call attention to ourselves and our issues. Some, but not all, the artists are in our organization, but the MC always is and the message is ours. So we use culture as a weapon.

Providing services is a necessary response to the crises their youth constituents face, and the lack of services available to help them. "Youth organizing tends to involve the most displaced youth," explains Kim McGillicuddy, formerly of Youth Force in New York City. "We don't see service as separate from organizing – we need to provide these services (court support and legal advice and referrals) to sustain our membership."

Immigrant groups also focus on culture and integrate service provision and legal advocacy into their organizing approach. Because their members are often vulnerable, first generation immigrants or

refugees not familiar with American cultural norms and non-English speakers, immigrant groups must develop their own forms of organizing. Ellen Somekawa of AAU in Philadelphia says:

> There's a discussion to be had someplace about the relationship between service and organizing. Are there ways in which doing the culturally appropriate thing goes against the prevailing models [of organizing]? We're trying to build a community where there are almost no communal bonds, affirmations, and institutions to support people or access to dominant institutions.

Groups create cultural events to draw members of the broader community into the organization's work. APIRH in the LA region held a school safety forum at a Cambodian temple, "which brought out a lot of the Cambodian community and put a spotlight on the leadership of these Cambodian girls." Betty Hung of APIRH explains:

> Originally, we took a more traditional approach in organizing and tried to put pressure on decision-makers. Now we incorporate Cambodian history a lot more. It's been much more creative. We infuse Cambodian history and culture in organizing and community building – oral history, community photo projects, and now theatre, into organizing. It gives us a very different feel and look and a way the girls can express themselves. They're more comfortable and they can educate the community in a way that they [are more able to] hear.

Youth are the bridge to working with adults for many immigrant organizations. Young people are often more likely to become involved than their parents because, as Hung observes, they are less marked by "the history of being refugees and its challenges – like displacement, living in poverty, cultural and language barriers, cultural and intergenerational tensions." But as young people become involved, the organization is able to build relationships with parents and families.

We're developing a new organizing model because there aren't models available for refugee communities. We're making it up as we go along. [Our] first principle is responding to the community and young women. All major decisions are [made] by them, we're not imposing [an] agenda. The second principle is using popular education and drawing on their experiences to decide what action steps to take. We use participatory action research. Unlike traditional organizing where the organizer [doesn't have an] ideology, we have an API feminist agenda. We try to look at the intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality. That's the basis of our curriculum – not to tell them what to think, but to ask them what they think about these issues.

Betty Hung, Asian Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health (LA Region)

In contrast, adult organizing groups in Chicago are largely multi-issue, neighborhood power–building and development organizations that have historically worked to empower their communities to fight for more open and responsive community schools. The citywide campaign for the Chicago School Reform Law to establish local school decision-making set a policy context within which community organizations could expand their work to improve schools. The movement to initiate this law built

on the political momentum of citywide multi-racial organizing that elected Chicago's first African American mayor, Harold Washington. Many Chicago groups such as the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, West Town Leadership United and COR are working in collaboration with local school councils, and are also involved in citywide organizing and state level legislative activity to protect the continued existence of these councils. Through the efforts of citywide groups such as Designs for Change, which initiated a citywide organization of local school council members called Schools First, some councils use community organizing approaches and take action collectively to intervene in city and state education policy.

The school reform organizing of many Philadelphia and New York City groups evolved from their neighborhood improvement work in housing, economic development and other quality of life issues. Groups in both cities draw on a variety of organizing strategies and use research and data in generating and advancing their reform proposals. Most also work in coalitions to achieve district, city or statewide change. Groups in these cities differ in how closely they work with schools, in part because of the history of school reform in each city. In Philadelphia, the Alliance Organizing Project works collaboratively with teachers and other staff. AOP's approach draws on its founder's prior experience as an IAF organizer, but was also shaped by its genesis as part of the former school Superintendent's citywide reform plan. In contrast, the long history of distrust between the school system and parent and community groups in New York City forces most groups to fight their way into the schools.

School reform organizing is relatively new in Washington DC and Baltimore; few groups are actively organizing, and existing groups are polar opposites -- large, nationally affiliated organizations (IAF and ACORN) and small, very local groups. Both large groups have focused on improving school facilities and creating new after-school programs, and are now considering teacher quality issues. In both cities, the school district administration is perceived to be dysfunctional and fortress-like, and parents and community groups are strongly allied with their local schools to target the district for more resources. Many community groups in Washington DC have been reluctant to challenge the school system for fear of losing their government funding.

Organizing issues

As groups identify and choose organizing issues, they do not progress from initial concerns about adequate facilities and safety in the lunchroom – what we call presenting issues -- to issues about improving the instructional core of schooling. Instead, groups seem to spiral continuously from presenting issues to core issues and back again. How the organizing alternates varies in each organization. Many groups begin by developing campaigns about presenting issues such as facilities, discipline and school safety. Howie Baum of SECO in Baltimore explains why:

> We use facilities issues as a way to bring people in and win victories that will help people develop the confidence to address issues that are integral to what's going on

> inside the school. Without this work, we wouldn't have a sustainable parents' organization.

Producing small victories is important to most groups' organizing; victories demonstrate the organization's power and build member's confidence and esteem. Early wins on tangible issues energize members and attract more participants, building power to engage deeper educational problems. Nathan Henderson-James of ACORN in Northern California says:

> Once the parents have experienced a win and have had the chance to feel what it's like to demand something from the school board and elected officials and get what they want, we work on tougher issues about structure and power in school, like getting parents involved with giving input to the school board. Ultimately we want schools to have much more parent and community input.

But groups also work on facilities and safety issues because they see them as necessary to achieving quality instruction. Describing their campaign to win more facilities funding and change the district's inequitable process for distributing these funds, Alberto Retana of South Central Youth Empowered through Action (LA) notes, "It was very serious – youth were saying they can't study when ceiling tiles are falling on their head or when the air conditioning is broken."

Many groups find it difficult to direct all their energies to improving the quality of instruction their schools provide. Focusing on instruction means groups must translate complex teaching and learning interactions into tangible issues that will energize members and generate clear demands that can be won through direct action campaigns. Because instructional issues are so opaque, and because it is so difficult to define effective schooling interventions, many groups continue to focus on environment and climate issues as they struggle with how to improve schooling outcomes. Moreover, presenting issues such as facilities and school climate are more likely to unify their constituency and gain support from school staff.

The overarching political context, including changes in school or district leadership or the implementation of policies such as the 1988 Chicago school governance reform, also influences which issues groups take on. Sometimes specific funding patterns create a new context for organizing. Groups with years of experience in education organizing (ACORN, IAF, and others) were able to start new small schools or charter schools, or expand small school initiatives in their districts, in part because the Annenberg Foundation challenge grants made funding available across major cities in the middle 1990s, and the Gates and Carnegie foundations have expanded these small school grant programs.

Local support organizations and national networks provide critical assistance

Local support organizations are providing critical assistance to new organizing initiatives at the local, city and state-level. These entities are helping groups translate complex teaching and learning problems into tangible issues with clear organizing leverage so that groups can build and maintain membership and broader support. The Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF) helped organizing groups develop campaigns to improve math curriculum and instruction in local Philadelphia high schools. PEF also helped bring more community groups into education organizing through its leadership development, training and strategic support to the Alliance Organizing Project.

In the Mississippi Delta, Southern Echo plays a formative role in the development of the six Mississippi organizing groups, and helps these groups take state-level action through the Mississippi Education Working Group. Groups in California, Chicago and New York City also receive assistance from local support organizations that combine school reform expertise with knowledge of organizing strategies, and help groups build city and statewide coalitions. Baltimore and Washington DC have very few organizing groups and report no such support organizations.

Community-based organizations and coalitions are also helping new organizing initiatives to emerge. The Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment in LA helped incubate and support the South Central Youth Empowered through Action. Similarly, Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth in San Francisco supported the development of Youth Making Change and Parent Advocates for Youth.

National networks such as ACORN, IAF, NPA and PICO provide critical support to member groups. PICO holds a weeklong national training twice a year for leaders, offers professional development for organizers, and brings all staff from PICO organizations together for an annual national retreat. Groups in the ERASE Network are using the Racial Justice report card, developed by the Oakland-based Applied Research Center, to expose the dynamics of institutional racism in public schooling. ACORN is helping its members develop local campaigns to improve teacher quality. The Center for Third World Organizing also trains organizers across the country.

In addition to ACORN, ERASE and the Center for Community Change, a national support organization, have recently taken up the issue of teacher quality. Their assistance may help more groups develop campaigns addressing the preparation, recruitment and retention of qualified teachers as well as the distribution of experienced teachers across their districts.

Figure 10: National Affiliations

ACORN	ERASE Partners	GAMALIEL	IAF	NTIC/NPA	PICO
Baltimore ACORN	Alliance Organizing Project (Phila.)	Oakland Coalition of Congregations	IAF Metro (NYC)	Blocks Together (Chicago)	Central Brooklyn Churches
Chicago ACORN	Californians for Justice		Organization of the Northeast (affiliated with United Power for Action and Justice in Chicago)	Brighton Park Neighborhood Council (Chicago)	Community Action Project (NYC)
N. California ACORN	Coalition for Educational Justice (LA)			Northwest Neighborhood Federation (Chicago)	Oakland Community Organizations
New York ACORN (Brooklyn, Bronx)	Generation Y (chicago)		Washington Interfaith Network (DC)	Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition	Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project
Philadelphia ACORN	Mothers On the Move (NYC)				San Francisco Organizing Project
	Queensbridge Community in Action (NYC)				Youth United for Change (Phila.)
	South Central Youth Empowered Thru Action (LA)				
	Youth of Oakland United, PUEBLO.				

Note: National organizations offer strategic support and training to deepen the capacity of member groups to carry out effective school reform organizing, but they operate in different ways. ACORN, IAF and the Gamaliel Foundation establish local organizations. PICO and NPA/NTIC provide extensive strategic assistance and help member groups take coordinated action. ERASE provides local groups with tools and technical assistance for organizing on racial justice issues in the schools.

Using data to leverage accountability

Using data helps groups empower members to address problems that schools have traditionally defined as family deficits rather than as institutional failures. Many groups routinely use data to develop their issue analysis and campaign demands. Oakland Community Congregations created report cards on the 90 schools in their district; the cards compared goals for each school in reading achievement and suspensions. In Chicago, Generation Y issued report cards showing how schooling outcomes are structured by racial inequality; a number of other Chicago organizations have consistently documented inequities in school policies and organized and advocated with local school councils to change those policies.

Most groups use achievement scores on annual standardized testing to assess their school's performance. Groups working with high school youth also use rates of high school graduation, drop

CHECK THE FACTS

- *Disappearance Rates*

Every year, our high schools lose thousands of students. Each school begins with a HUGE freshman class, which dramatically shrinks every school year through graduation time. About 61% of South LA students "disappear" before they reach their senior year. We call this the "disappearance" rates because the official transfer and drop-out rates do not account for this enormous loss of students.

- *Penitentiary Tracking*

In the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), 61% of South LA students "disappear" and there is an alarming rise in the number of students forced into special education. The LAUSD has placed 1 in every 5 African American students in special education, where students are three times more likely to have untrained teachers and to drop out. Many of these students end up in prison, where most of the population did not complete high school.

- *College Eligibility*

According to 1999 state records, only 12% of students graduating from South LA high schools went on to attend California's public four-year colleges. Statewide, only a quarter of African American and Latino public high school graduates were even eligible to apply to a UC or Cal State University (most of them are missing one or two required courses.)

South Central Youth Empowered through Action (LA)

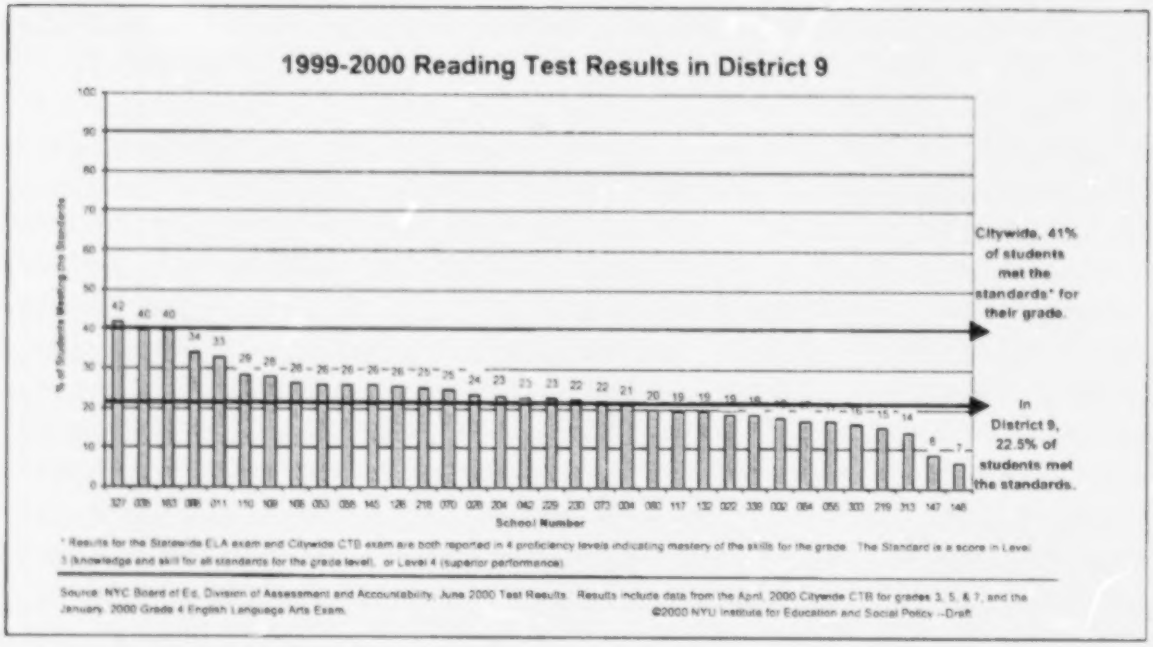
Sources: Statistical data provided by the California Post Secondary Education Commission (CPEC), the Los Angeles Unified School District, the National Institute for Literacy, and the Los Angeles Times.

out, suspension and college acceptance as measures of school performance. Some groups gather this information through action research carried out by their members. Youth members of Generation Y in Chicago, for example, surveyed 350 students from different schools about their schools' zero tolerance discipline policy. Many groups also rely on local support organizations to help them obtain outcomes data from districts and translate the numbers into useful displays for their members. Megan Nolan of the New Settlement Apartments Parent Action Committee, in New York City, describes this process:

> The Institute for Education and Social Policy broke down the school report card and put it in laymen's terms so everyone could see that only 17% of the children in the school could read at grade level. That data changed things for parents - it transformed it from a personal issue about their child into a larger political issue. We took that information and turned it into a flyer showing that 8 out of 10 children are not reading, and parents used this to talk with other parents.

Washington Interfaith Network in DC uses school facilities data generated by the 21st Century School Fund because the district's data capacity is very underdeveloped. The Neighborhood Capitol

Figures 11A-B: Data Illustrations


1999-2000 Reading Test Results in District 9
% of Students Meeting the Standards
School Number
Citywide, 41% of students met the standards* for their grade.
In District 9, 22.5% of students met the standards.
* Results for the Statewide ELA exam and Citywide CTB exam are both reported in 4 proficiency levels indicating mastery of the skills for the grade. The Standard is a score in Level 3 (knowledge and skill for all standards for the grade level), or Level 4 (superior performance).
Source: NYC Board of Ed, Division of Assessment and Accountability, June 2000 Test Results. Results include data from the April, 2000 Citywide CTB for grades 3, 5, & 7, and the January, 2000 Grade 4 English Language Arts Exam.
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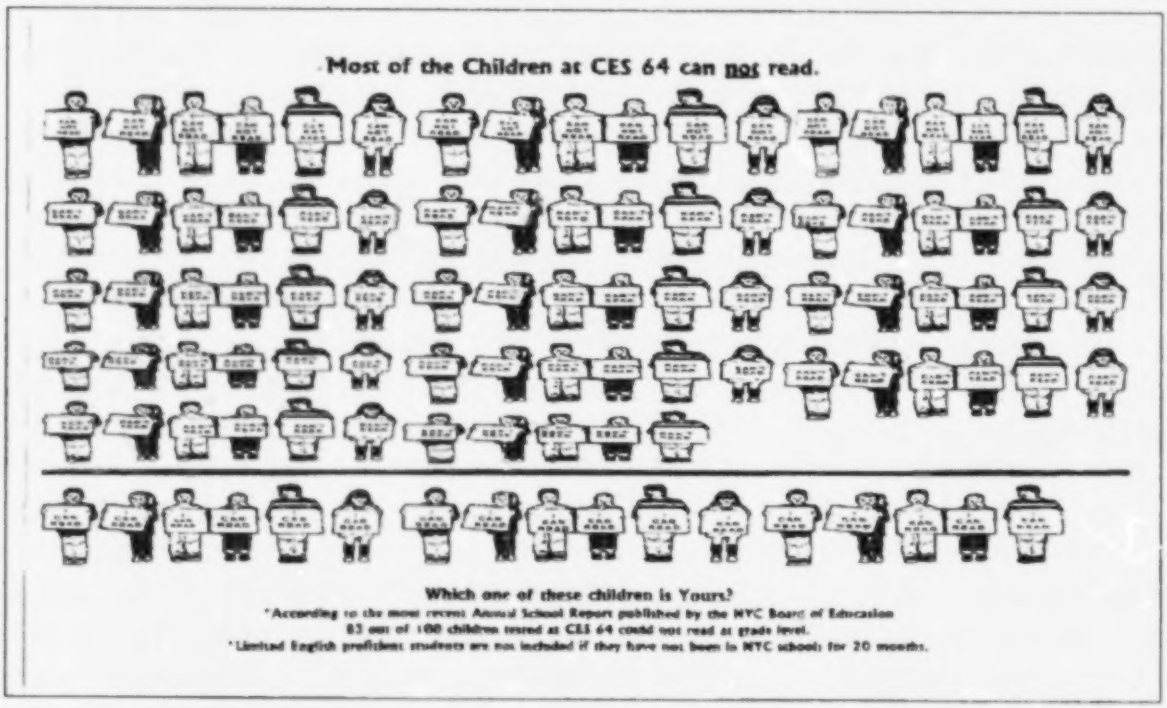

Most of the Children at CES 64 can not read.
Which one of these children is Yours?
*According to the most recent Annual School Report published by the NYC Board of Education
83 out of 100 children tested at CES 64 could not read at grade level.
*Limited English proficient students are not included if they have not been in NYC schools for 20 months.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Budget Group in Chicago does research on school facilities issues, creates tools for groups to use in their organizing, and helps groups develop their organizing and negotiating strategies.

School outcomes, facilities and demographic information are not the only kinds of data groups are using. South Central Youth Empowered through Action in LA gathers and analyzes data on state and local expenditures on prison construction, the numbers of incarcerated youth in their localities, as well as the numbers of high school youth who go on to college. All groups regularly collect information about the concerns, experiences and opinions of their members through surveys, meetings or focus groups, and involve members in gathering similar kinds of information from the wider community. Youth Making Change in San Francisco hired a public relations firm to hold focus groups, using resources made available through its sponsor organization, Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth.

Other critical data include observations from visits to higher performing schools, as well as interviews with experienced educators about what constitutes effective teaching and learning. Parents and Students Organized (PASO) in Watts, LA developed observations checklists (with their Community Schools Initiative partners including California Tomorrow) for school "walk throughs" and to collect data on curriculum and instruction. (Chow, et. al. 2001). These data not only help groups formulate specific, substantiated reform proposals, but also inspire members with a crucial sense of hope. Eric Braxton of the Philadelphia Students Union explains, "Youth have such a sense that the way things are is the way they have to be. It's important to help them see that things can be different. It doesn't have to be this way."

WHAT WE WANT

1. *Find the Disappeared:* Create programs at schools with "high disappearance" rates; locate "disappeared" students and put them back on track to graduate.

2. *Stop Penitentiary Tracking:* Stop forcing "dead-end" classes on low-achieving students; stop placing students in special education simply because they are behind in reading; stop using special education as a disciplinary tool; prepare students in special education and alternative programs to return to regular schools and graduate.

3. *Prepare Students for College:* Inform all students and parents of required courses for college admission and provide them with regular counseling and college prep services; make college required courses available to all students and place them on track to complete the classes within 4 years.

South Central Youth Empowered through Action (LA)

Alliances with teachers

In a few important instances, teachers have become resources and allies of groups' organizing efforts. The Philadelphia Student Union, for example, convinced teachers in a neighborhood high school to support the organization's proposal for increasing professional development time for teachers. In Chicago, effective local school councils with two elected teacher representatives work with teachers to improve teaching conditions, for example, through allocating funds for staff development, classroom libraries, computer resources and access to xerox machines. Most teachers, however, are reluctant to work with organizing groups. In Tunica County, Mississippi, teachers who attended meetings of the Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County, were identified as troublemakers by the district administrator, threatened, and harassed.

But teachers can also react negatively to organizing campaigns. Many youth group members, for example, were harassed and patronized, and found their concerns dismissed by their teachers. Because young people are often trying to change the schools they attend, they are particularly vulnerable to retaliation. Parent organizing efforts also meet with hostility. Gordon Whitman reflects on the experience of the Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project (EPOP):

> There is not a real willingness to see parents as decision-makers in the quality of public education. The big teacher concern is that parents will dictate to them how to teach. We realized this has more to do with teacher-teacher relations than teacher-parent relations. Teachers are treated [terribly] and the deal is they can do whatever they want in their classroom. Parent questions about what they are doing challenge that arrangement.

But groups continue to develop strategies for establishing dialogue between teachers, parents and youth. Most of this work is relatively new, but a number of distinct strategies are already emerging:

- The Logan Square Neighborhood Association in Chicago trains and places parent reading mentors and tutors in classrooms in ten schools. Each school has appointed a staff person to work with the LSNA-trained parent mentor/tutors, and to continue their training in the specific methods of reading and assessing student needs at their school. These coordinators work with teachers to create positive, collaborative relationships with the parent mentor/tutors.

- The Alliance Organizing Project and the Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project (EPOP) in Philadelphia build relationships with teachers and engage them, with parents, in developing possible solutions to schooling problems. EPOP parents try to find opportunities to talk with teachers, and help parents come to these discussions armed with "a lot of thinking and learning about instruction."

- Oakland Community Organizations in California created an organizing position specifically to build support among teachers for their small schools campaign:

> Every organizer has eight churches they work with, and all are involved in school reform. We felt were reaching parents, but not teachers and they're a critical piece of school reform. We took a step that's unusual in our organizing model. I was a leader out of St. Anthony's church and I was a union organizer and now I organize teachers full time. We've built trust with teachers so that our work with small schools feels like it's for them. I've worked with them for only one year and already there's a good relationship in place. (Liz Sullivan)

- The San Francisco Organizing Project is training teachers to do home visits, as part of a PICO initiative.

An unusual example of parents, teachers and students working together is the newly formed Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) in LA. CEJ was initiated two years ago by a progressive network of teachers, all of whom are members of the California Consortium of Critical Educators and of the United Teachers of LA. CEJ began mobilizing teachers against Proposition 227 to end bilingual education, and is now fighting high stakes testing and the state's policy of tying school funding to performance on these tests. To expand and strengthen their base, CEJ teacher members are reaching out to parents through home visits and house meetings, as well as to young people in their high schools. The organization is also working in coalitions with other direct action youth organizing groups.

Some teacher unions are slowly beginning to work with organizing groups. Collaborations between unions and local community groups are forming in Baltimore, New York City, Philadelphia and San Francisco. The Alliance Organizing Project (AOP) publicly supported the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers' (PFT) demand for a negotiated settlement to the prolonged contract negotiations with the City of Philadelphia. AOP's support led to an agreement between AOP and the PFT to hold a series of Social Justice Unionism dialogues between teachers and parents in a number of schools. ACORN is engaged in a number of teacher collaborations around the country: it is working with Oakland Community Congregations, the East Bay Asian Youth Center, the San Francisco teachers union and the Bay Area Coalition of Essential Schools to advocate for more new small schools. In New York City, ACORN's organizing against the Edison project led to an alliance with the teachers union to improve four failing schools. The NYC United Federation of Teachers is also part of a statewide coalition seeking increased state funding.

Constructing coalitions for policy reform

More than 80% of the groups we surveyed are part of longstanding citywide or regional coalitions, and many others join temporary coalitions to elevate their struggles to citywide or regional levels.

Neighborhood adult groups in Baltimore, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia and the Bay area tend to be part of coalitions, while groups in Washington DC and LA are not. Youth groups in LA and the Bay area are highly likely to be involved in citywide, regional, and statewide coalitions. All the Mississippi groups are members of a statewide education improvement coalition, which played a significant role in their development.

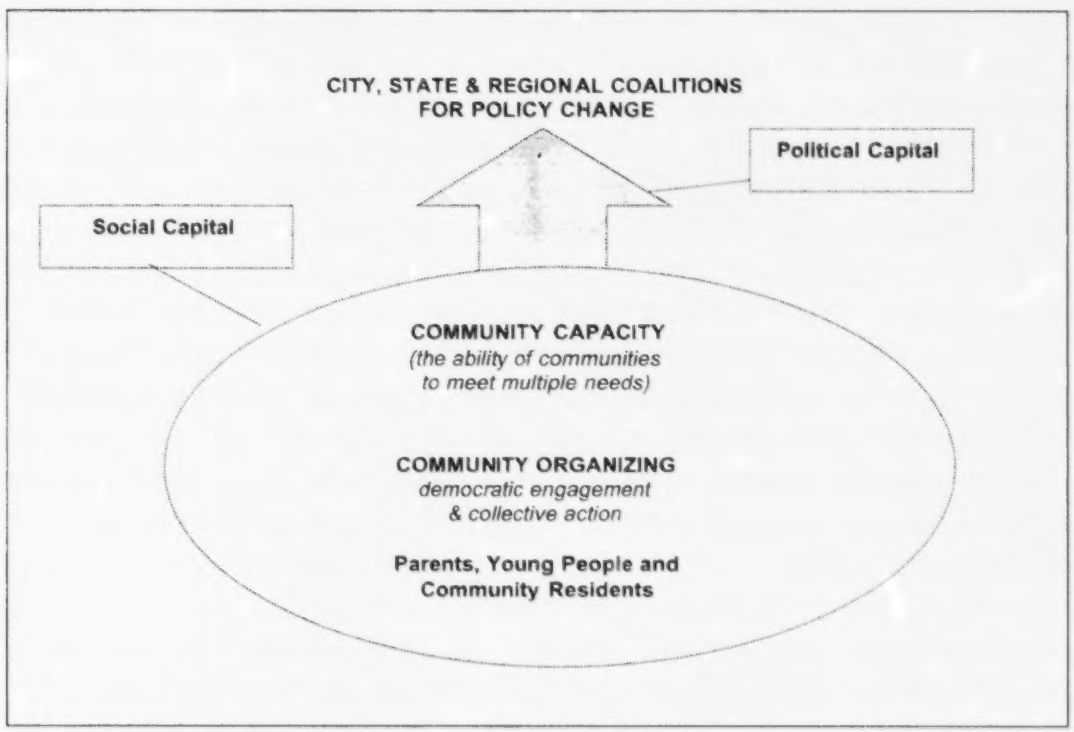
City and state-level coalitions most often target funding, governance, small schools, discriminatory discipline and facilities improvement. In some instances, funding initiatives like the NYC Donors' Education Collaborative and local support organizations play a crucial role in the formation of coalitions. Through coalitions, groups gain access to information and expertise; participating in the Mississippi Education Working Group gave Citizens for Quality Education of Holmes County a "chance to examine state policy and understand how it works against us."

Several coalitions are long-term efforts of groups with similar goals, strategies and constituencies, such as the Parent Organizing Consortium in New York City that brings together eight neighborhood-based organizing groups. Yet other neighborhood-based power organizations prefer to work alone because, as Martin Trimble of Washington Interfaith Network (IAF) in DC put it, "What's our self interest? We don't need you to get our voice. We don't join coalitions – we are a coalition. You can join us. WIN enters an alliance only if it enhances our power. We need union locals; that is power coming together. The Teamsters can get us 1,500 custodians."

The formation of coalitions indicates the growing capacity among groups to tackle policy issues and work together in broader movements for change. For example, ACORN, an organization with a long-standing reputation for being reluctant to work in coalitions, is now working in coalitions in several sites in this study.

As shown in Figure 12 on the next page, organizing groups join issue-based coalitions to leverage their organizational political capital into broader and more powerful efforts to influence the highly politicized decision-making processes in district, city and state bureaucracies. Working in coalitions requires blending different organizational styles and perspectives – coalition politics and methods of lobbying through organizational representatives can conflict with the direct-action tactics and the participatory norms of some organizing groups. It is also difficult to keep members involved over long policy campaigns; the daily pressures of their lives and the lack of concrete, winnable benchmarks work against sustained participation. Multi-issue groups may be better able to balance local organizing with working in coalitions because they can engage members in other local campaigns.

Figure 12: From local organizing to policy change.
Community organizing generates social capital (the networks and relationships between members) and political capital (the clout and competence a community can wield to influence public decisions in order to obtain resources, services and opportunities from the public and private sectors.) Social capital functions horizontally at the community level. Political capital, however, enables community groups to challenge the structural relationships that define the level of resources and quality of services their community receives. Groups join coalitions to leverage their organizational political capital for broader policy change.



Because business organizations, academic institutions, labor, and other sectors with power and legitimacy are less frequently involved in these coalitions, community groups have less access to educational power brokers. (ACORN and IAF are exceptions. Both organizations have developed local alliances with unions in several sites.) Moreover, in Los Angeles and the Bay area, where there are numerous examples of broad school reform initiatives, these efforts tend to operate separately from the coalitions constructed by community organizing groups. We found only one example of collaboration between school reform organizations and community groups in the two

California sites.[1] Indeed, California organizing groups see the established school reform organizations as exclusive entities that monopolize information, access and funding, and make it difficult for groups to sustain effective organizing. Although parents and young people share educators' concerns about student achievement, the issues they raise and the language in which they frame them often differs not only from educators, but also from school reform initiators and advocates, as indicated in Figure 13. There are few opportunities, little shared terrain, and limited supports for any translation and communication across these sectors. (Chow, et. al, 2001.)

Figure 13: Central issues of educators versus community organizing groups

ISSUES CENTRAL TO THE LEARNING COMMUNITY OF EDUCATORS IN SCHOOL REFORM	ISSUES CENTRAL TO THE AGENDAS OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING GROUPS AND THEIR CONSTITUENCIES
• Professional collaboration and creating learning communities; • Authentic assessment and examination of student work; • New teacher support; • Standards implementation; • Role of the district in reform; • Site management; • Academic support programs and interventions; • Literacy development; • Instructional strategies for English learners; • Block scheduling, "families" and academy groupings – and other structural forms of creating smaller and more personalized units.	• Discipline and the criminalization of youth; • Distribution of resources; • Tracking; • High stakes testing; • Curriculum inclusiveness (ethnic studies, etc.) • Youth empowerment; • Safety; • Quality of teaching/relationships; • Language access and bilingual education; • Facilities (repairs, overcrowding, toxics, etc.); • Quality of relationships – how children and parents are treated; • Superintendent selection; • School privatization.

In Chicago, the broad participation of the business community, foundations, and universities in school reform since the late 1980's has provided consistent support for the community organizations, citywide groups and local school councils implementing the school reform law. Universities, for example, became members of the Consortium on Chicago School Research, producing consistent high quality studies of the effects of Chicago school reform. Universities also increased teacher training for urban schools and organized networks of three to ten schools, for which they became an external provider of staff, curriculum and leadership development, aided by the Chicago Annenberg Challenge and other funding sources.

[1] In Oakland, the Oakland Community Organization, the East Bay Asian Youth Center, the Bay Area Coalition for Essential Schools, and later ACORN came together to shape a "small schools" campaign for the district. The unique mix of skills, strategies, knowledge and perspectives have fueled a powerful initiative in the city, and attracted funding for community design teams to establish new small schools. (Chow, et. al. 2001.)

STRATEGIC QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL REFORM ORGANIZING

Groups organizing to improve their local schools confront four major strategic questions: access, legitimacy, accountability and developing effective strategies for improving schools.

Access

Every group struggling to improve its neighborhood schools faces problems of access. Groups need access to data about student outcomes across time to analyze the continuity of school performance. They need access to data about student academic outcomes disaggregated by race, ethnicity and poverty, so they can assess whether, for instance, poor black students score consistently lower on reading tests or are referred to special education at much higher rates than white students. They need access to information about teacher certification and other teacher quality measures to help them understand whether experienced teachers are predominantly located in the district's most advantaged schools. They need physical access to failing schools so they can engage teachers and administrators in ongoing dialogues about how to improve school performance. Most important, they need access to the educational settings where critical schooling issues are defined.

But many schools and districts are so insulated and defensive that they reflexively deny access to critical data, information and participation. Many schools limit access to classrooms and restrict opportunities for engagement with school staffs through excessively bureaucratic rules and open hostility.

In the face of such restrictions, community groups often develop varieties of methods to get the access and data they need. Some file Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. ACORN in New York City used a tactic developed by groups testing for housing discrimination. To analyze the extent to which children of color were routinely denied access to special programs, they sent teams of black parents and white parents to inquire separately about opportunities to enroll their children in, for example, gifted programs.

In contrast, almost all the Chicago groups gain access through their position on local school councils, or their support for parent members of those councils. They mobilize parent and community candidates for the elections and work with elected members. For example, parent members of Rogers Park Community Action Network collaborate on councils with teachers and the principal to make decisions about the school's improvement plan and allocate funds in the budget. These positions give groups considerable access to information about school programs, policies and practices.

The majority of youth and adult groups in this study gain access by developing relationships with the school's principal or a core of powerful teachers. These relationships allow groups such as the

Alliance Organizing Project (AOP) and the Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project (EPOP) to meet with teachers and parents during the school day, and hopefully to get information about school instruction and organization. The parent mentor program used by the Logan Square Neighborhood Association and West Town Leadership United in Chicago also facilitates access to schools.

Youth groups gain access to schools through relationships that staff or members develop with key leaders inside the school, or because they are mediating some kind of crisis or are part of a youth development or leadership project funded by the district. Young people are often so marginalized in their schools that access to most information depends on the relationship between the adult staff of the youth organization and the staff of the school. Youth United for Change in Philadelphia, for example, gained access to a local high school through a prior relationship between its director and the school's principal.

> Our approach has been literally to be in the school in their classrooms during class time doing leadership workshops on issues local to that school. Students can meet in some cases during the school day. I can hang out in the lunchroom with the kids. I have access in and out of the building based on relationships. (Rebecca Rathje)

Regardless of how groups gain access, keeping it depends on maintaining a working relationship with school staff. It is easier to maintain this relationship when parents play a traditional support and involvement role, or address issues that target policy and practice at other levels of the system. But when parents, youth and community groups focus on school-level education issues, such as reading, bilingual education and graduation rates, "that's when you start to get a lot of resistance. EPOP has been thrown out of every school we've organized," says Gordon Whitman.

Group responses to threats to their access depend on the depth of their organizing experience and the span of their political connections. Most groups try to negotiate first.

> In one school, [the Philadelphia Student Union] wanted young people to be involved in the principal selection process. The (acting) principal got angry and almost banned us from the school. The students met with him and explained that they weren't against him; they just wanted a voice in the process. We had enough real connections that he knew it could be trouble for him if he didn't work with us. We also went over his head and talked to other people in the district. In the end, it was probably a combination of things that made him back down.

Sometimes schools are responsive "to people who act with principles...even if they might wish we weren't there," says Jeremy Lahoud of Generation Y in Chicago. Often groups are forced to stage events, with media present, to embarrass the school into acquiescing to the group's demands. "When the students get blown off," Lahoud continues, "then maybe we do some direct action." Or, as Melissa Spatz of Blocks Together in Chicago put it, "if people refuse to meet with us, we take the

meeting to them." Groups working inside the school are more successful if they have an independent base of power to back them up. Rebecca Rathje of Youth United for Change (Philadelphia) says:

> We have been able to confront some issues that are controversial and still not be kicked out of the school entirely, though there are times when the school makes it very difficult to be there. We're getting a lot of recognition for the work that we do, and the school district knows they have to deal with us.

Legitimacy

All groups face struggles for legitimacy. In almost every school in which adult organizing groups attempt to intervene, an officially sanctioned organization – the PTA or similar parent group – already exists, supposedly to represent parental concerns and articulate the parent voice. However, parent members of these groups are too often easily co-opted by administrators since the parents have no independent base of power, no control over substantial budgets, little permanence, no staffs, and no capacity to organize. School officials often try to undermine the legitimacy of new community efforts by refusing to meet with -- and actively discrediting -- any group other than the parent association. Emily Blank of Cypress Hills Advocates for Education (CHAFE) in NYC recalls a meeting where

> the turnout was very successful. But it made a lot of principals angry and the parents who were aligned with them got angry. They began to circulate a petition against CHAFE. Then teachers came to ... try to intimidate the group. It's like, "What is this if it's not the PTA?" I never knew how paranoid and controlling principals could be.

Because schools and districts are often so isolated from other community institutions, a community group with a long history of neighborhood work may find that the school's administrators and staff are either ignorant of or dismissive of the group's experience, achievements and capacity.

Therefore, most organizing groups start by building a parent, youth or community base for school change that establishes the fledgling group's legitimacy as a group with power that genuinely represents the constituencies served by the school. Some groups work with an existing community base outside the school, as New Settlement Apartments in New York City did with the parents of its after-school program. Other groups, such as Brighton Park Neighborhood Council in Chicago, begin by organizing door-to-door, and through one-on-one meetings build a base of parents that may never have been engaged with the school and its official parent organizations. Other groups work through established neighborhood institutions such as churches, block groups and tenant associations, as IAF, PICO and Gamaliel-affiliated organizations often do.

Victories on issues that benefit school administrators can help establish a group's legitimacy, especially when the issues involve targets that are not at the school level and the victories are

concrete and visible. The Northwest Neighborhood Federation (NNF) in Chicago was initially ejected from local schools by hostile principals. But because of NNF's organizing on school facilities, principals and teachers "saw NNF as having credentials" and now work closely with the organization.

Members' ability to skillfully negotiate selected issues also helps establish an organization's legitimacy. Successful organizations work through the barriers imposed by hostile school staffs by providing training, and other developmental experiences such as school visits, that demystify what schools do and arm parents or young people with both data and knowledge. The Indianola Student Parent Group (MS) is

> constantly researching state laws, school handbooks and other documents to get an understanding of where our schools are according to state law and our rights as parents and citizens. In cases where the law does not address our concerns, we work with the groups from the Mississippi Education Working Group to formulate strategies to impact state policy.

Mothers On the Move members' presentations at citywide forums and national conferences made it harder for local education officials to dismiss MOM's demands. Helen Schaub of MOM (NYC) recalls,

> When we were battling the former superintendent, he had principals call the police on parents who came to meetings with the principals. We were even attacked in the local press. But when our members were invited to speak at conferences about what we were doing, and they were quoted in the citywide press, things started to change. We got support from the Chancellor, and from lots of other organizations. The superintendent couldn't simply denounce us as troublemakers anymore.

In Philadelphia, parent leaders of the Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project "did a listening campaign on reading and brought the results with them [to a meeting with school staff and administrators.] They could say, 'We listened to 200 parents and here's what they say about reading.' They were very careful to talk about changes both in the school and at home."

Organizations also draw legitimacy from alliances with other groups; "building ally relationships and networks have increased the visibility of APIRH and Asian Pacific Islander girls' leadership," observes Betty Hung (LA region.) Generation Y's report on suspensions in the Chicago public schools "has been used locally and nationally, which gives us legitimacy," Jeremy Lahoud says. Such alliances are most powerful and legitimizing when they include the breadth of stakeholder groups on education. Groups in Chicago, Mississippi, New York City and Philadelphia – sites with extensive school reform organizing-- have been more able to establish these linkages than their counterparts in LA and the Bay area.

Figure 14: How groups are addressing access and legitimacy challenges in schools

	OUTSIDE				INSIDE
HOW GROUPS GAIN ACCESS TO SCHOOLS	Make external demands on the school through FOIA requests, public accountability meetings or other strategies	Build relationships with powerful staff or administrators	Work as parent volunteers in classrooms	Get elected to, or provide training to, local school councils	Help members run for election to local school board
HOW GROUPS ESTABLISH THEIR LEGITIMACY	Apply pressure from outside through rallies and protests that demonstrate people power	Build relationships with powerful staff or administrators	Develop relationships with classroom teachers	Seat(s) on local school council establishes group as an inside player	Seats on school board provide some oversight authority over local school.

Accountability

Most groups direct their initial questions about school performance, climate and conditions to the school; the principal is the first target. But administrators and school staff are not the only people who determine what happens in school systems. Even within relatively authoritarian central governance structures such as Chicago's, where the Board of Education is directly answerable to the Mayor, local school personnel, councils and sub-district administrations wield considerable power in determining how systemic mandates are carried out. Moreover, school districts are not the only obstacle to more extensive community involvement in schools. As our data suggests, education reform in LA and the Bay area has been largely defined by regionally based, heavily financed school reform organizations controlled by educators and business groups to the exclusion of community organizations. Such diffuse accountability makes it difficult for groups to determine a clear target.

> The almost astounding lack of a clear decision-making path [and the] lack of accountability in the school [is another challenge.] They have this new decision-making body called a shared decision-making council that was new, and its supposed to be not just the principal making decisions. We know that that body had the power to vote our demand in, so initially our strategy was to focus on them. But then we found out that despite what the chair was telling us, they actually had no power yet, they were not even officially recognized by the district. They hadn't had their training. The rest of the school does not even acknowledge them. What seemed like made sense, and what seemed like this is the decision-maker, wasn't true. But then it

> wasn't clear who else could be. So at some point we targeted the whole faculty for a vote, because it was up the faculty whether [the school] could do the program. This was difficult because it was 90 people. (Grace Kong, Asian Youth Advocates, Bay area)

How accountability is exercised in many urban systems discourages schools from acknowledging performance issues. Taj James of Youth Making Change observes: "If the things you are rewarded for are making your school look good, then you end up hiding problems, covering things up, because if people find out about the reality, you'll get in trouble." In this context, school accountability discussions quickly become blaming exercises. Teachers blame the poor preparation of their students, the apathy and ignorance of their parents, or the incompetence or disinterest of their principal. Principals blame the inexperience or incompetence of their teaching staffs, the unfairness or incompetence of the district staff, the remoteness or arbitrariness of the superintendent. Superintendents blame principals, teachers, parents and the state education department, as well as the refusal of voters or the Mayor to allocate sufficient funds. Parents also get caught up in the blaming exercise, and many fall victim to it. This dynamic is one of the biggest challenges organizing groups face, says Zelda Alpern, of Queensbridge Community In Action (QCIA) in New York City. "Parents buy into [the argument] that it's their fault and their children's fault -- we're constantly fighting against that pervading mythology."

To short-circuit this chorus of blame, several organizing groups have targeted their district's political structure as the ultimate accountability entity. ACORN and IAF often target district and city leadership, rather than targeting principals because, as Bronx ACORN put it, "principals can't always deliver." Mitch Kline of Baltimore ACORN explains:

> We tried at first to organize parents around a specific school, but we got bogged down in fighting about water fountains. We don't want to get pigeon-holed into various schools and their individual problems. Instead, we want to build a constituency and attack macro issues at a system level, and then hold the system accountable for progress in schools.

In districts such as Philadelphia and Chicago, in which mayors have been given the power to appoint school boards and superintendents, it may prove easier to identify and go after them as a clear accountability target. Several groups have organized to change the composition of their local school boards and to replace ineffective or unresponsive superintendents.

- In Tunica County, Mississippi, ranked the 2nd poorest county in the nation in the 1990 census, parents won three seats on their school board with the help of the Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County. Community Advocates for Educational Excellence (CAEE) in Harlem, New York City elected a majority slate to its local school board and ousted two superintendents.

> We've been able to fire two superintendents and three principals through our organizing. The next big success was the take over of the school board. We infused

> the board with a slate of candidates from our organization. Eight members ran and five were elected. Thus far, we have direct control of thirteen schools in our district, where ten of our members serve on school leadership teams. In four of those schools, we helped elect the PA president and vice president. Parent involvement [in those schools] has been a big success. (Bruce Ellis, CAEE.)

- Groups working with immigrant populations such as the Community Action Project in Brooklyn, NYC, hope to increase school responsiveness by electing members of their community to the local school boards. Because immigrant parents can vote in school board elections, even if they are not US citizens, these elections are also viewed as a way to engage their constituencies in local democratic processes.

- In San Francisco, Youth Making Change (YMAC) targeted school boards as a way to expand the role and influence of young people in educational decision-making. YMAC fought for and won new positions for students on the local school board.

How groups approach targets varies considerably. Some groups follow an IAF model of negotiating wins with their targets before they put them on stage in a public accountability event. Groups often use a pre-arranged approach to pressure targets. As Taj James of Youth Making Change in the Bay area explains,

> If we can get something by asking for it, we'll ask for it. If we have to fight for something, we'll fight for it. There are some organizing groups that on principle feel you should fight for everything, and there are a lot of good reasons for that in terms of educating your members, but we tend to ask for stuff first. So, we do a lot of negotiation around, for example, our demands, and the officials try to compromise. That's part of the process.

Some groups carefully position themselves in an external accountability role -- consistently raising demands to improve local schools through public accountability meetings, press events, rallies and direct action. Mothers On the Move (MOM) in New York City fought to remove a long-time superintendent who had ignored failing schools in their neighborhood for almost two decades. MOM organized meetings and staged demonstrations targeted at the district, Chancellor and Board of Education to call for improvements in their local schools. Four years later, under a new superintendent, test scores are slowly rising and school facilities are much improved.

Developing effective strategies

All community groups confront the dilemma of how to work with the school. Some groups try to work with existing parent teacher associations, while others organize to take them over. Some groups work independently of the inside parent group, but attempt to establish a collaborative relationship to avoid being pitted against it by school administrators. The majority of New York City

organizing groups have members who participate on parent associations or school-based decision-making teams to stay informed about school practice, but they do not work through these teams to bring about change. Other groups attempt to work with the sanctioned parent associations – either by positioning themselves as the "issue organizing committee" or by helping members elect new leadership.

Youth organizations sometimes target the school-sanctioned structures that officially represent students. Alberto Retana of South Central Youth Empowered through Action says, "Over the last two years, we've been running folks for student government for changes and to redefine student government. We didn't want it to be a popularity contest anymore. 95% of our candidates have won. We talk about issues – [it's] not about vot[ing] for me because I'm cool or a friend. It's not about the individual. We do events with candidate debates, endorsement hearings and put out literature about the candidate."

A few groups such as ACORN, IAF and the Cypress Hills LocalDevelopment Corporation have taken an institutional approach to school improvement by opening new small schools. Working with district staff, these groups have articulated alternative visions for schooling, recruited and hired teaching and administrative staff, and developed innovative governance structures like the parent-educator co-principal leadership structure at the Cypress Hills Community School. These groups generally position themselves within the school as the community liaison – helping to support the involvement of parents and other community resources. They also create internship opportunities for young people in the surrounding neighborhoods, and engage youth and parents in neighborhood organizing campaigns. The Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation also trains teachers in how to conduct home visits.

Many youth and some adult groups build relationships with dysfunctional schools by providing services that improve schooling capacity, and use the relationships developed with school practitioners as platforms for organizing. Asian American Lead (AAL) in DC runs a center that provides mentoring, after school programs, youth leadership training and parent activities. It has also developed an advisory group that meets monthly with the school principal to discuss their concerns. West Town Leadership United in Chicago pressured a neighborhood school to expand the hours for after-school activities and trained 88 parent-mentors to go into 6 schools for several hours a week. At the end-of-year evaluation, "teachers clearly gave the parents credit for how students were really able to pass exams they hadn't been able to before."

Working from inside may judge the group so deeply in school-supportive relationships that it becomes difficult to raise issues of poor school performance or develop the leverage necessary to generate school change. Parents participating on "inside teams" like the school council can get pulled into a "relational black hole," says Kelley Collings of the Alliance Organizing Project (AOP) in Philadephia, becoming so enmeshed in relationships with school staff and administrators that they

are reluctant to raise performance concerns. But working from the outside may lock the group into polarized or confrontational relationships that demonize the group and unite school constituencies in rigidly defensive postures. One of the problems of working from an outside model of organizing, says Megan Nolan of New Settlement Apartments Parent Action Committee (NSAPAC) in New York City, is not being able to have "a finger on the pulse of the organization to know what is going on."

In contrast, Chicago local school councils are charged with setting priority goals in their School Improvement Plans and allocating funds for activities that will help to reach these goals. The most common goals are improving reading and math, creating a safer and supportive school environment and increasing parent participation. Through these councils, community groups are able to identify performance problems, and to work with the school in developing school support programs. This approach seems to be more effective in Chicago because of the safeguards and power of the reform law. Many parent members of NYC groups have fought their way onto school management groups, only to be stymied and alienated by the bureaucratic norms of the management team.

Many youth groups organizing for school change in California begin their work as school-sanctioned efforts to reduce conflicts within schools, and they use a variety of innovative organizing tactics. Margaretta Lin of Youth Together in the Bay area says,

> When we talk about direct action, it looks different than when you're on the outside organizing. In Castlemont, we brought all the political stakeholders together to the school, held a press conference, and then held an all-day education event with community people doing different workshops. Angela Davis was the keynote speaker. [Our message was] we're taking back the school after all the race fights, and students are taking leadership on this and where's your commitment?

But as groups take up their student constituents' demands for more equitable discipline policies, or more inclusive curricula, they risk being prohibited from organizing within the school by the school's administrators, and being forced to work outside. How to resolve this tension is an ongoing dilemma for groups. Rebecca Rathje of Youth United for Change in Philadelphia explains,

> Organizing inside a school where the principal is the target can be strange. We want to hold him or her more accountable but the consequence of being kicked out of a school can hold you back. Yet, one of our strengths is that we're physically in the school. Certain teachers who feel, 'how dare they—the kids were so happy before they came along'—have to shut up and deal with us.

Luis Sanchez of LA Youth Organizing Communities says, "to get more access we've been working on a level that's polite and appeasing, but that's our concession."

Our data suggest that experienced groups rarely employ purely inside or outside strategies or use only confrontational or collaborative approaches.. The New Settlement Apartments Parent Action

Committee (NYC) decided to work outside the system in response to the school and district's dismissal of parent concerns, but is now trying to develop relationships with individual teachers and the teachers union. In contrast, though the Alliance Organizing Project's approach, in Philadelphia, is based on developing relationships with powerful school staff, the organization faces the challenge of how to raise critical performance issues without losing these important relationships. For both groups, the relationship with schools is continually tested and re-negotiated over time as school and district leadership change.

How groups address and resolve the critical questions of access, legitimacy and accountability depends on their specific political contexts and the history of their organizing efforts. Groups with more experience draw on a range of strategies: they use outside approaches to build pressure for reform and inside approaches to develop important allies. They develop alliances with other organizations to help build their power and provide them with access to research and data. And they are combining local organizing with working to bring about system-wide change, often as part of coalitions.

WHAT ARE GROUPS ACCOMPLISHING?

New youth and adult leaders are emerging with the skills, knowledge and vision to raise fundamental questions about school performance and access, and draw others into school reform campaigns. Groups are building local organizational power and capacity to back up their constituents' demands, and many are achieving striking success in their school improvement campaigns.

Community capacity for school reform

All groups note the development of new forms of capacity among their constituencies: **new leadership skills and social capital, new deliberative community space, and new political capital.** Through the development of *new leadership skills and social capital* among members, young people and parents have been empowered to take on leading roles in their organizations and their schools. Margaretta Lin of Youth Together in the Bay area says,

> We develop young people to take a stand, to speak up, to be out there, to be visible. We've been able to recruit some youth who are very marginalized and turn their leadership skills into something for the positive rather than the destructive, that channels their potential, their brilliance, into a positive direction. People at the school site have seen that.

Because of groups' organizing, committees have grown, and "parents have learned who has the power to change what we want to change." Young people and parents "now realize they can and must hold the school accountable." Chicago ACORN's work in four schools "has created fairly sophisticated parents who can hold much more of their own with teachers and principals." (Talbott) Zelda Alpern of QCIA (NYC) observes, "Parents own the organization; they ran it for four months without staff support. Parents feel equipped to speak at public meetings, they are familiar with school jargon and can participate with confidence on school leadership teams." Melissa Spatz of Blocks Together in Chicago reports,

> When we started with the windows, it seemed like an impossible dream. We started with the Stowe windows issue when a group of parents saw that Blocks Together won a rat abatement issue. To see people move from that point to talk about designing a new school, that is a success! In a neighborhood like this -- very low-income, many people do not speak English -- the idea of winning city services seems impossible. People realize when they come together they can win, so they start to dream.

Creating new *deliberative community space* in which parents, young people or residents can work together to fight for change is another critical form of capacity building. Often these organizing groups provide the only local, democratic and inclusive space in which young people and adults can articulate their voice and actualize their leadership skills.

> Our biggest success is having created a place where parents can take their concerns about the schools, and where they trust the process of working together to hold their schools accountable. There wasn't a place to do this before in Queensbridge. Many people didn't believe that folks would come together to change things. But this group has met every week for almost two years without fail. (Zelda Alpern)

The third critical dimension of new capacity is the development of new *political capital* through the organization of residents and institutions in the community, and the formation of new citywide and regional coalitions for schooling change. Alpern observes, "We have developed power through sustained organizing. When we're doing outreach, most people have heard of us and are supportive. The local clergy is also supportive – we've been able to develop positive relationships with them." Media coverage of protests and meetings has helped groups raise the visibility of community accountability demands on schools, where before they had been silenced, marginalized and dismissed.

> The Superintendent knows about us and our parent organizing, and the city knows who we are too. We've gained a lot of visibility and community power.
>
> Isabel Toscano, East Bay Asian Youth Center, Bay Area.

How are schools and districts reacting to this increased power, leadership and engagement? Organizing often provokes hostile reaction from schools because, as Grace Kong of Asian Youth Advocates observes: "Teachers and other people [are] threatened by what we [are] doing... because we're actually trying to change the relations of power." As groups continue organizing, their relationships with education and other officials change. ACORN members in Northern California "developed respect and leverage with the superintendent and school board." Through its sexual harassment campaign, APIRH (LA region) has established "recognition for the Cambodian

How are groups measuring their impact?

Most groups track changes along a range of indicators including:

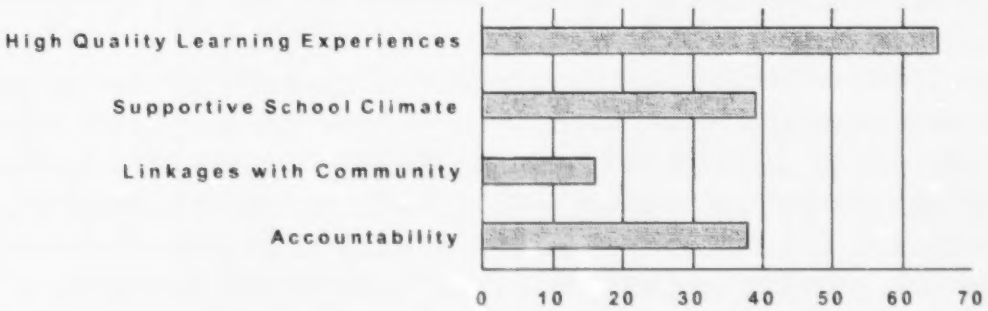
- Turnout at meetings and consistency of member participation over time;
- New roles and skills of leaders;
- Ability of the group to get a meeting with power brokers;
- Specific commitments from public officials to campaign demands;
- Press coverage;
- New relationships with other organizations with power and legitimacy;
- Improved school culture and relationships between schools and parents or youth;
- Increased parent or youth involvement and interest in the school;
- Changes in student achievement.

"We look at how many people participate in actions, the nature and quality of how leaders ran the actions, and much power was generated: Did officials change their minds? Did we bring in a new constituency? Did we get media coverage?"

Adam Krugell, Northwest Neighborhood Federation, Chicago

community – that the Cambodian community is really significant and does have a voice and a place, and that these girls are developing leadership to bolster their community." "The district doesn't take QCIA lightly," Zelda Alpern says.

Figure 15: Frequency of school reform changes reported by groups



High quality learning experiences (65) Curriculum and instruction (21) Small schools and charter schools (6) Staffing and Professional development (12) Equity issues* (26)	**More supportive school climates (39)** Facilities (29) Safety (10)
Greater school accountability (38) Parent and youth participation in governance (14) Access and responsiveness (13) Replacing ineffective school/district leaders (11)	**Stronger school-community linkages (16)** School attitude and culture (2) Parent involvement (6) After school programs (6) School-based health services (2)

* *Note: This category refers to a range of access and opportunity concerns, such as academic tracking, the criminalization of youth in schools (police in schools, suspensions, and unfair discipline policies), inadequate funding and the inequitable distribution of existing resources between schools, and the over-referral of black students to special education.*

Schooling changes and challenges

When asked about specific school improvements, groups listed commitments they have won to change school policy and practice. As Figure 15 shows, organizing victories most often related to creating **high quality learning experiences** through improving curriculum and instruction; opening

new small schools and charter schools; improving staffing and professional development; and confronting equity issues such as tracking and the over-referral of students to special education. A coalition of Bay area groups including the East Bay Asian Youth Center, Oakland Community Organizations and ACORN won new policy agreements to open ten new small schools. Also, in the Bay area, Youth Making Change got novels and texts by authors of color to be required in all English courses. The Phildelaphia Student Union won support from teachers for creating a regular time for professional development for new instructional methods. Asian Americans United (AAU), also in Philadelphia, won bilingual education programs in a public school and a high school. "Out of these fights, constituents had a sense of winning something concrete and learning in the process," says Ellen Somekawa of AAU. Alberto Retana of South Central Youth Empowered through Action (LA) recounts a successful campaign on an issue common to many youth groups:

> Last year there was a big crisis at one of our high schools. We did a survey at the school to find out why most people weren't graduating. It turned out there were serious issues around counseling and academic tracking. Forty percent of students who took the survey were given classes that they already passed with a B or higher, or weren't given schedules by the fourth week of school. It was evident that graduation rates were low because no support was available. Most youth didn't even know what a transcript was. We launched a campaign to change this and Fremont hired two new counselors and fired the principal. That did something temporarily, but we know it's much larger than just those two counselors and changing the principal.

Groups report numerous **school climate improvements**, such as the adoption of a new sexual harassment policy, improved facilities and more facilities' funding for overcrowded districts.

> Our campaign has been incredibly successful. We essentially won everything we asked for and more. We've ... worked with the school to implement the girls' recommendations from their campaign... We got the administration to show a video about sexual harassment to all 4,500 students at Poly High School's pre-registration... the school has also agreed to have trainings for teachers and more in-depth trainings for health classes. (Betty Hung, APIRH, LA region)

> [At a public accountability session,] we said "we are short 4000 seats" and we got them. All but one school is functioning much better -- less overcrowded, administration smoother, class size reduced, noticeable increase in scores in four critically overcrowded schools -- 25% in math and 4-5% in reading scores. (Adam Krugell, Northwest Federation, Chicago.)

> Our biggest accomplishment was getting the site of a new elementary school moved closer to the black community. For the first time, the black community in Tunica County realized that through unity and organization, we could create a community that we all want to live in. This victory gave us the confidence to begin to address other issues in our schools such as the state-appointed [administrator] who is not looking out for the best interests of the students and the excessive suspension and

expulsion rates in the high school. (Melvin Young, Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County, Mississippi.)

We had a campaign around a playground next to Malcolm X elementary school. There were holes, crackvials and syringes. We had a big fight with the city and we had a group of parents lead it. We won new equipment, mulch, etc. It was a good win because it was visible. (Mitch Klein, Baltimore ACORN.)

Washington Interfaith Network has had some dramatic successes. Shortly after taking office, Mayor Anthony Williams made good on his campaign pledge to WIN to fund after-school programs. The City Council agreed to commit $15 million to a dedicated fund, to be administered by a new, independent Community and Youth Investment Trust. $15 million more will be committed by the end of 2002. In addition, four other city-funded after-school programs are administered by WIN member organizations.

In October 2000, WIN presented Superintendent Paul Vance with a five-point agenda:
1) Support building audits in up to 25 schools by WIN teams to identify priority repair and capital projects.
2) Finish priority repairs no later than March 14, 2001, and top capital projects by September 1, 2001.
3) Attend Action Meeting on December 4 to receive team audits.
4) Start repairs in three schools immediately, and report status on December 4.
5) Meet with WIN leaders every four to six weeks to monitor completion and develop action plans by March 2001 to address school staffing and safety issues.

The next day, the *Washington Post* reported, "DC Superintendent Paul Vance last night promised hundreds of parents that he would complete repairs they identified at 25 schools across the city. The parents, organized by the Washington Interfaith Network, plan to complete audits of the school buildings and create lists of work that needs to be done. During last night's meeting at Asbury United Methodist Church in Northwest, Vance agreed to complete the work by March 15." (To date, work has begun at nine schools and is continuing).

Martin Trimble, Washington Interfaith Network (IAF), Washington DC

Source: Henderson, Anne (2001): *Community Organizing for School Reform, Washington DC: A Recovering Plantation*, Institute for Education and Social Policy, NY.

By increasing parent and youth participation in governance, replacing ineffective school and district leadership, and demanding new access and responsiveness from school staff and administrators, many groups are dramatically changing local **school accountability**.

[We began organizing] at a high school in Oakland because the quality of the school environment was declining. We discovered middle class black and white families were going ... away from schools... because of the lack of strong leadership by the site administrator. [The] church held an action about it [and] 200 people were there,

> [including] parents in the school, neighbors, parishioners. The result is the principal was reassigned. (Clifford Gilmore, Oakland Community Congregations)

> We got a public school –traditionally low performing—off the state's list of failing schools. With the help of organizers and state officials, we were able to take over the school's parent association and school leadership teams, and we are now in the process of challenging the principal and organizing a campaign to get her out of the school. Two years ago, at PS 33 for instance, parents organized the school's parent association and succeeded in firing the principal for years of failure to confront the school's poor academic performance.(Bruce Ellis, Community Advocates for Educational Excellence, NYC)

A number of groups have won commitments for new after-school programs, and pressured schools to open their facilities during after-school hours for mentoring and other enrichment programs, that **strengthen school-community linkages**. The San Francisco Organizing Project helped win a commitment to implement forty after-school homework centers.

> We impacted policy to allow parents in the school in a real way so that the schools are now actually accountable and help keep parents and kids accountable... [This is] changing practices... reading scores are [on the rise], attendance rates are up, discipline and suspension rates are down... (Nancy Aardema, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, Chicago)[2]

Such linkages provide a platform for school staff, parents and youth to work collaboratively for school improvement. Sarah Jane Knoy of Organization of the Northeast in Chicago explains,

> Getting money for creating community center programs at Brenneman and Stewart elementary schools... is a success because... it's a vehicle for creating relationships between parents, teachers, the community and administration – relationships that are needed to change the culture in the school. Changing the culture in schools is what is needed to achieve the goals of school reform.

These organizing victories suggest that, in a relatively short time, community organizing for school reform is already significantly shifting relationships, priorities and practices in schools across the country. Nonetheless, many groups expressed frustration at how quickly their organizing victories can be reversed. District commitments often meet resistance from school staff and administrators; the press is often fickle and more interested in sensational problems than in reporting on the steady but slow work of school improvement. High turnover in leadership and staff in low performing schools works against sustained change, as does the size of the bureaucracies in which groups are trying to make change. In Baltimore, Mitch Klein (ACORN) reports, "Half of the school board has

[2] In the six schools where Logan Square Neighborhood Association works most actively, the percent of students reading at or above the national average in 1990 ranged from 10.9% to 22.5%. By 2000, the percent of students reading at or above the national average ranged from 25.4% to 35.9%. The gain ranged from 7.3% to 21%. (Davenport, 2001.)

been dismissed. We got a new mayor; the superintendent just quit and a new one starts (in July 2000). Just when we're getting started, people leave." Rebecca Rathje of Philadelphia's Youth United for Change says:

> You organize, you win and if you're not vigilant, a lot goes back to the way it was. Take our campaign to get water fountains at a school -- the problem was so huge it would have been a multi-million dollar effort to resolve. The principal in the meantime put in water coolers. Principal left, water coolers left. Eventually the fountains got re-done, but only because we stay on top of it. We got rid of general math, but then we found out that a watered down Algebra course was being taught...

Asian Americans United in Philadelphia won a new bilingual program only to have it implemented in a hostile school. It was, Ellen Somekawa recalls, a "very disempowering victory."

Most groups see the victories of their issue-based campaigns as intermediate changes. As Ismene Speliotis of ACORN (NYC) put it, "We're measuring our impact by what we get committed, but ultimately an indication of improved academic achievement in those schools is the only one that counts." Groups work to improve school performance through components of a larger school transformation strategy (such as smaller class size, teacher mentoring, more challenging curriculum). With the exception of groups focused on school councils, most organizing groups do not control the process through which schools actually implement whatever they win. Taj James of Youth Making Change in San Francisco suggests that groups need to coordinate their work to maintain pressure for reform at the top and bottom of the system.

> Getting policies in place and getting school systems to agree to support your demands is a lot of work and a multi-year process – but it is only about a quarter of what you have to do. You can get a school board or a superintendent to say this is how we will do things, but how it plays out or how it is implemented is the biggest challenge to school organizing. ...In terms of change, you have to figure out how to [work] from the top and the bottom and have ways to find out if policies are actually happening at the school sites.

As external organizations, community groups face the challenge of how to best influence what happens inside the school – even when they have won a seat at the table, as is often the case in Chicago. Fran Tobin of Rogers Park Community Action Network (Chicago) asks:

> In a standard community organizing model, you cut your issue. There is a clear target and set of demands. You mobilize the community, get concrete wins (or losses) and then you move on to something else. This model can be used for issues such as facilities, where there is a clear and concrete problem and solution, but how can it be used for quality of education, teaching/learning, and what goes on in the classroom issues? How can you organize a campaign around "teach better?" Who is the target? The teacher? The curriculum? What does the victory look like? More commitment of a teacher, better scores? Organizing requires confrontation, is that the best strategy [for these campaigns]?

Fran Tobin's question raises the issue of whether issue campaigns can bring about school transformation, or, as California Tomorrow's Ruben Lizardo defines it, "how do the technologies of direct action, issue-based community organizing fit the task of transforming schooling structures, policies and practices?" Direct action, issue-based organizing builds organizational power and leverage, but it is more difficult for external groups to fit this approach to the deliberative process of school transformation. The experience of groups in New York City suggests that it is extremely difficult to move from an external accountability organization to an inside group working collaboratively with the school for change. As Helen Schaub of Mothers On the Move in New York City observes, "When we were working on school restructuring committee at a local junior high school, [our leaders] ended up spending more time with teachers and the principal on the committee and became isolated from the larger group, the broader constituency of parents."

A number of faith-based organizations have tried to address this concern by developing partnerships with schools early in their organizing because their organizational base is potentially more stable than a base of individuals, allowing them to build long term relationships with schools. Clifford Gilmore of Oakland Community Congregations explains, "Community organizing really has a different kind of base than faith-based organizing. The mobility factor erodes the base, but with a faith-based model people may move but the church is still going to be there." Yet, several of these groups voiced questions about how to integrate schools into their faith-based organizing. Schools and faith-based organizations are not parallel member institutions and do not necessarily share common values or vision. Bob Untiedt of the San Francisco Organizing Project says:

> We're trying to do work in schools but it tends to be transient and our relationships not necessarily well founded. Whereas relationships based on common values (e.g. our faith based connections) are more comfortable, the lack of [commonality and ongoing] relationship between people in schools and our members (churches) is the hardest thing to deal with."

The length of time significant schooling change requires makes education organizing, particularly campaigns about improving teaching and learning, hard to sustain. Mothers On the Move's experience suggests that when schools and districts are defensive and resistant, groups must be able to sustain their pressure and focus over many years. Significant membership turnover is inherent in education organizing; youth age out of organizing groups, and parents age out when their children move on from their local school. Even though congregation bases tend to be more stable, the school parent teams created by faith-based groups experience comparable levels of turnover. Issues of standards, assessments or teacher quality can rarely be resolved solely by local levelaction, but when groups expand from local organizing to pressure other levels of the school system, they risk losing connection with their base. Campaign demands can become so distilled, and struggles so prolonged and consuming that campaigns lose clear relationships to members. In the time required to win

change, particularly system-wide policy change, the original leaders often age out and new leaders do not feel the same stake in the issue.

Our data suggests that community organizing groups play a significant and essential role in creating the political context in which change can happen – they focus schools on critical schooling issues, identify and build support for key interventions, and establish new and stronger accountability relationships between schools and communities. The role of community organizing in framing the discussion and keeping the focus on reform is important. Ultimately, effective community organizing – whether individual or faith-based, direct action or more collaborative – may depend on institutional interventions to produce instructional, organizational and cultural changes in schooling. Organizing groups have developed the skills and capacity to engage parents and youth on schooling issues and make powerful demands for change. But they do not have the infrastructure, experience and access to carry out these institutional interventions. The groups described in this study are producing important social capital and community capacity outcomes that have long-term implications. They are increasing the ability of young people, parents and community residents to participate in local school reform efforts, and they are helping members to raise essential school performance questions forcefully and persistently. In the process, they are beginning to rebuild local democratic processes -- prying open closed, insular and defensive public institutions to greater scrutiny, participation and accountability.

EXPANDING EDUCATION ORGANIZING

Strengthening existing groups

Many of the groups responded to our questions about expanding education organizing by identifying the difficulties involved in securing and sustaining support for this work. Organizing groups want to increase their organizing staff and need funds to do this. Several of the youth organizations subsist primarily on volunteer energy, and lack the resources to hire staff. Other organizations are chronically short of funds to maintain the staffing necessary to sustain effective organizing. A number of groups observed that while funding is available for education reform work, foundations tend not to support organizing, so their work has to be convoluted to fit funders' frameworks. Many organizations report being forced to cobble together budgets and to constantly reposition their work. Several groups working with immigrant constituencies define particular needs for bilingual staff. Virtually all the organizations tie the potential for building empowerment directly to available funding; "if you under-fund your base, it limits your ability to succeed."

Most groups believe that the education arena is harder to navigate than other neighborhood issues. They define school systems as more opaque and bureaucratic, and schooling leadership as more arrogant and unresponsive than the leadership of other public institutions. To negotiate this system successfully, groups need skilled organizers who command a range of organizing methods, understand their political and educational contexts, and can think strategically about how to foster and sustain parent, youth or community leadership in lengthy and complex education campaigns. Where will those organizers come from?

> We're up against a bureaucracy of thousands of people and we have a staff of nine.
>
> Taj James, Youth Making Change, San Francisco

* * *

> It is possible to win things if you stick with it long enough, but funding is an obstacle. You have to have enough organizers to keep the pressure up.
>
> Mitch Kline, Baltimore ACORN

A few youth groups such as South Central Youth Empowered Through Action consciously recruit new staff from among their members. In New York City, three adult organizing groups formed the Training Institute for Careers in Organizing (TICO) in 1997 to recruit, train and mentor new staff through three month internships in the founding organizations (ACORN, Mothers on the Move and the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition.) The Oakland-based Center for Third World Organizing's MAAP program places prospective organizers with experienced organizing groups around the country for three-week summer internships. Chicago's Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform has developed an introductory training curriculum for education organizers. These programs help to recruit and prepare new organizers. But such efforts currently support only a handful of organizations -- comparable programs do not exist in most of the eight sites.

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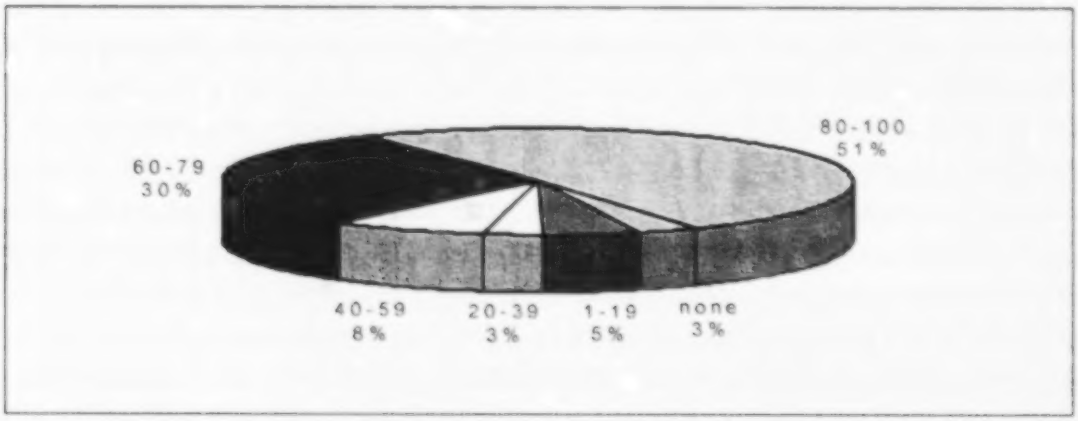
Finding enough qualified staff and raising enough funds to hire organizers and pay them a living wage are chronic problems that undercut the effectiveness of education organizing. Much of the organizing work described in this study is episodic. In NYC alone, one group's education organizing was placed on hold for over a year while the group searched without success for an organizer; another group is on the verge of giving up education organizing because it has not found qualified staff.

Figure 12: Over half of groups receive 80% or more of their funding from foundations.



Bringing new groups into the field

Though the field of organizing for school reform is expanding almost daily, many more organizations can be engaged in this work. Neighborhood-based organizing groups that work primarily with adults can be encouraged to develop an intergenerational approach to organizing, and to work with youth organizations.

Groups with a history of organizing in other issue areas, such as housing and environmental justice, can be encouraged and helped to do education organizing. The Central American Resource Center (CARACEN) in Washington DC is organizing Latino immigrants to fight gentrification that threatens to push them out of their homes. In CARACEN's discussions with tenants, the quality of schools constantly emerges as a key issue.

Community development corporations, youth service agencies, immigrant service and advocacy groups all have developed meaningful relationships with their youth, parent and resident constituencies, and have the staff and infrastructure necessary to support and sustain school improvement organizing. Groups offering after-school programs and other developmental opportunities for youth can expand their focus to organizing students and adults, as the Indianola

Student Parent Group did in Mississippi, and New Settlement Apartments did in New York City. Groups like Association House and the Beverly Area Planning Association with over a decade of school reform experience in Chicago might be drawn into education organizing.

The style and priorities of the organizing group sometimes diverge from the procedures of the larger organization, and can isolate the organizing group and make it difficult to sustain the work. Isabel Toscano of East Bay Asian Youth Center in California observes:

> In our structure, we wanted parents to be separate from the community-based organizations involved. We didn't want them to be intimidated or swayed by professionals. But we haven't been able to bridge the two groups yet. The relationships of professional [CBO staff] and parents are parallel; they don't cross.

The conflictual potential and confrontational style of some community organizing can also jeopardize the host group's relationships with the school system and other potential funding streams. In Washington, DC, potential organizing groups such as the Latin American Youth Center, the Columbia Heights-Shaw Collaborative, and the Calvert Multi-Cultural Center, feel they need a sense of "permission" from their funding sources to move into organizing. As Marian Urquilla of the Columbia Heights-Shaw Collaborative points out, "organizing is desperately needed, but it's hard for us to do. We would be organizing against our funding source." Bebe Otero of the Calvert Center expressed an additional reluctance: "To leap into organizing is an issue of resources. Public funding is not the whole issue. We get Department of Human Services and foundation funding, but not for organizing work. Our comfort level is not in organizing." (Henderson, 2001.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Efforts to expand and strengthen school reform organizing must overcome four key impediments. First, community organizing groups are severely under-resourced. Second, there are not enough local support organizations to assist community groups organizing for school reform, and without them, existing community organizing groups will not be able to sustain themselves and too few new groups will enter the field. Third, community organizing groups and the organizations that fund and provide strategic assistance to them need better and more appropriate ways to assess the impact of this work. Fourth, not enough philanthropic organizations understand or are committed to funding and sustaining this organizing.

The following sets of recommendations synthesize what we learned from the work of the 66 organizations across the eight sites.

1. Address the need for greater infrastructure and capacity among community groups organizing for school reform.

This report demonstrates what groups operating on minimal, even non-existent budgets can accomplish. But to continue this work, and expand it to the scale necessary to achieve schooling change, the severely under-resourced state of community organizing must be addressed. Therefore, we urge:

- Increasing funding for hiring community organizers for school reform so groups can provide a viable community voice in school improvement;

- Investing in the development of organizers by funding at levels that provide a living wage and that cover the costs of attending training sessions and other learning forums that improve organizers' skills;

- Providing core support funding (to cover the costs of renting space, purchasing computers, and establishing internal systems that enable groups to function effectively);

- Sustaining funding commitments over a longer term than just the typical three years so that community capacity gains can impact the focus and priorities of school administrations and staff;

- Supporting the development of internal training, organizer development and political education to build the capacity of parents, students and community members to collect data and information that helps them understand schools, design and use effective organizing strategies, develop their

political analysis of the causes of school failure, and deepen their understanding of historic and systemic patterns of school systems;

- Supporting the development of training and tools specific to the challenges of school reform organizing that offer opportunities for paid organizers to engage in collaborative learning and leadership development; explore underlying school equity issues and develop the skills and knowledge to demystify key school reform issues for parent and community constituents; and

- Creating a pool of funds that organizing groups can access for legal assistance when they have reached the limit in their local organizing and need to use legal strategies to move their organizing forward.

2. Invest in creating or expanding the efforts of local support organizations.

Assistance from local, regional and national networks and support organizations plays a crucial role in developing local organizing and building broader citywide, statewide and regional coalitions for policy change. These organizations provide tools and training to help groups analyze their schools and develop their school reform strategies. They help groups gain access to the world of school reform organizations and reach potential allies. They also link groups doing complementary work. Some networks and support organizations recruit and train the education organizers critical to this work.

Our research shows that there are not enough of these organizations, particularly at the local level. Funding should be targeted to create or expand the efforts of organizations that support local organizing by:

- Investing in the development of local support groups that provide strategic assistance to organizing groups in defining schooling problems, learning to use data in their organizing, and crafting effective school reform organizing campaigns;

- Increasing the opportunities for sharing and learning across groups, constituencies, cities, networks and coalitions. Disseminating organizing narratives that articulate the strategic choices groups face, as well convening national or regional meetings for groups to visit each other and share their strategies, are critically important efforts. Learning the story of the LA South Central Youth Empowered through Action, for example, might encourage and help more youth groups to expand from criminal justice to school improvement organizing.

- Creating or enhancing the pipeline of organizers to community groups through training institutes or programs that organizations can join. One possible model is the Training Institute for Careers in Organizing in New York City.

3. Develop better ways to measure the impact of community organizing for school reform.

The Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform and Research for Action are completing a study of the success indicators used by education organizing groups. Their findings and our research caution against using one-dimensional indicators such as annual test score results to assess the effectiveness of organizing efforts. The experience of Mothers on the Move suggests that the timeframe for schooling change resulting from organizing efforts is particularly long, and depends on a chain of intermediate results – replacing ineffective principals and superintendents, the implementation of new instructional programs, the engineering of deep changes in school cultures and organization. Capturing such changes through indicators requires measuring more than test score results.

A more complex set of indicators can be assembled. When school cultures begin to change and pervasive low expectations for students begin to shift, both student and teacher attendance often improve. Referral rates to special education fall, and rates of suspension and expulsion decline. At the high school level, graduation rates increase and dropout rates decline, and the percentage of students taking college preparatory courses, Advanced Placement courses, and SAT and ACT examinations increases. As previously low-performing schools become more instructionally effective, the percentage of parents attending parent-teacher conferences often rises, and the profile of the teaching force often changes, with more experienced and qualified teachers replacing novice staff. Finally, the changing nature of the district's commitment to these schools often registers as increases in base and categorical funding, facilities upgrading, and district recognition of schooling improvement.

All urban districts collect the range of indicators summarized above. What is required is using the most appropriate combination of such indicators to assess the results of organizing efforts.

But improving schooling outcomes, however broadly and most appropriately defined, is not the sole or even primary goal of most organizing efforts. Our research indicates that almost all organizing groups, adult and youth alike, are committed to building the social capital and political capital of their neighborhoods, as well as the long term community capacity required to fundamentally change local conditions. As the Cross City and Research for Action research demonstrates, indicators of increased community capacity (such as indigenous leadership, democratic engagement and norms of collective action) to improve neighborhood infrastructure, services and the quality of neighborhood life are essential measures of organizing effectiveness. Therefore, effective measures to assess the effectiveness of organizing for school reform should include:

- Indicators that capture the changes groups are trying to achieve and assess whether the issues groups are raising are critical to improving student achievement;

- Indicators that measure increases in community participation in school reform processes and changes in the nature of the accountability relationships between schools and communities;

- Indicators that assess the extent of neighborhood transformation and constituency change brought about by the growth in community capacity organizing efforts have developed;

- Indicators that capture the extent of instructional, organizational and cultural change that the school, as an institution, is undergoing; and

- A combination of schooling indicators that most appropriately reflect the changes in student academic outcomes, policy, practices and performance over time that organizing groups are achieving.

4. Build understanding of and support for community organizing within the philanthropic community

Foundation support is critical to sustaining and expanding this work. But both the reform and foundation communities are often riven by debates that polarize instructional and community interventions. Our research indicates that community-based interventions ultimately depend on institutional interventions that produce instructional, organizational and cultural changes in schooling. Successful community organizing provides the external leverage to initiate, support and sustain such efforts.

Therefore, we urge efforts that help the foundation community understand that organizing efforts to improve schooling are indispensable complements to school- and district-level change. Such efforts should:

- Create opportunities to increase foundation staff and board knowledge and understanding of community organizing and its contribution to school reform;

- Develop opportunities to demonstrate that lasting education reform needs organized community support, understanding and advocacy;

- Help funders appreciate how regional context and variation shape groups' missions, goals and organizing strategies;

- Help funders recognize the centrality of leadership development to the goals and outcomes of community organizing groups;

- Help funders link organizing to other foundation-supported school reform efforts and education improvement initiatives, as well as to efforts to engage the wider public and media in public education;

- Help funders link funding for school systems to the achievement of access and legitimacy for parents and community groups;

- Help funders recognize and support the critical roles and contributions of youth organizing groups; and

- Help funders understand the importance of working with community organizing groups to develop grant goals and requirements.

Although the organizing across these eight sites varies, all the groups focus on mobilizing their constituencies to examine school practice and performance and, through collective action, bring pressure to demand improvements. This education organizing represents a new form of parent, community and youth challenge to the traditional expert, professionalized and bureaucratic leadership of the public schools. Moreover, the growth of this organizing suggests that a new kind of accountability relationship is emerging between schools and communities. This new form of accountability replaces and revitalizes traditional forms of parent involvement such as individual participation in PTAs and similar groupings, and signals a major shift in the power relationship between families and schools, as well as a growing role for young people in school reform. Through this work, community groups are inserting a new voice into local and national conversations about public education. Public school parents and youth, often from the most marginalized neighborhoods with the lowest performing schools, are increasingly making themselves heard.

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